BATMAN THE MOVIE

#70

SCREENWRITER
SAM HAMM
WHAT THEY LEFT OUT OF
HIS SCRIPT OR CHANGED

CREATOR OF
CAPED CRUSADER
BOB KANE
DOESN'T DIG
DARK KNIGHT

TREATMENT WRITER
STEVE ENGLEHART
ROBIN TO HAVE DIED
IN FIRST 45 SECONDS

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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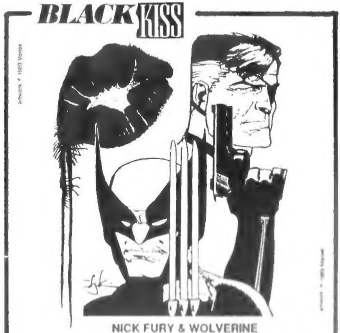

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The DAK Knight

UP FRONT

INTERVIEW is unique among comics magazines.

Our slogan says it all: **"We let the industry speak for itself."**

We print interviews, all interviews, and only interviews.

Indeed, as I said in my editorial for the very first issue of COMICS INTERVIEW: "The idea is to provide a place where comics fans and professionals can get to know one another as people. Some of the other fanzines do a very good critical job . . . but in this case people will speak for themselves."

So don't mistake us for just another comics news magazine — we have made every effort to sidestep the standard 60 MINUTES approach and bring you, instead, exclusive inside-the-industry interviews. We endeavor to make our interviews less an "us-or-them" situation — which would be absurd since, unlike the others, we are not outside observers; we *work* in the comics field — but rather take an informal approach, as if sitting around and rapping after hours.

Where else can you find such

far-reaching subjects as **Frazetta, Kirby, Moebius, Moore, MacNelly, Miller, Byrne** and **Schulz** — and those are just a few of the big (and diverse!) names whose opinions and observations we've brought you. But we don't just feature interviews with the big guys. COMICS INTERVIEW is unique in that *everybody* from all walks of comics life can be found here.

You can learn a lot by reading INTERVIEW — it's like taking a course in every aspect of the comics industry. Each issue is a cornucopia of information from a surprisingly diverse array of sources, among them publishers, production artists, colorists, letterers, retailers and others. Professionals. Talking about what they know best: comics.

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We're well established and well respected, a credible voice in the comics industry. We're celebrating our *seventh* straight year of publication. Yet this is not to say we haven't had our problems.

Feedback from devoted readers indicates frustration at not always being able to find INTERVIEW on sale in comics shops or Waldenbooks. Copies often sell so fast that folks miss an issue they're searching for and end up paying higher prices — up to $25 each for certain rare back issues. In some cases, demand for key issues of COMICS INTERVIEW has proven so strong that we've made them available again in square-bound trade paperback editions on quality paper (you'll see ads for some of these SPECIAL EDITIONS scattered through this issue).

As I wrote, back in issue #24, "It's not the popular comics of today, with print runs of a quarter to a half million copies that everyone is carefully preserving in plastic bags which will be tomorrow's collector's items. I believe folks today may be surprised to find that, in the future, magazines such as COMICS INTERVIEW stand a far better chance of becoming the truly sought-after and valuable collector's items."

So what's the problem?

On the one hand, it's wonderful news that COMICS INTERVIEW sells well and is in such demand —but on the other hand, as I said way back in issue #9, it's very frustrating to us that many of you can't find copies, even when you want to. I have been told many times by retailers, "We're happy with COMICS INTERVIEW — it's perfect, it sells out!" Alas, for you readers and for us, how many sales were lost by not carrying a few more copies, to provide for those of you who came in looking for the latest issue *after* all copies had already been sold?

There is something you can do to help solve this situation. Please make your local comics dealer aware of your interest in this magazine. Always ask for COMICS INTERVIEW by name, and if you don't see it, make a point of requesting that your shop order *more* copies.

Or to avoid missing any issues (and to save a substantial amount off cover price) you can, of course, subscribe. Details can be found in the small print to the left, and a subscription ad with coupon precedes the back issue section on page 92.

But, whatever you do, don't miss the next five issues of COMICS INTERVIEW — they're among the *best* we've ever published . . . especially our upcoming landmark **75th issue**! See you here.

Take care and stay aware!

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL:
UP FRONT
a rap with *dak*
4

WRITER:
SAM HAMM
jeff gelb gets the inside story on the script that finally got the movie going
6

WRITER:
STEVE ENGLEHART
of controversial claims, movie treatments and more, as told to *lou mougin*
31

SPOTLIGHT:
BATMAN THE MOVIE
dean motter & mark askwith on the batman movie set
42

ARTIST:
BOB KANE
creator of the caped crusader converses with *jeff gelb*
46

ARTIST:
DICK SPRANG
vintage batman artist voices his views to *lou mougin*
60

EDITOR:
TOM COOK
a dialog with the *dc heroes* game honcho on updating the role-playing universe
72

FILMMAKER:
RON MANN
comic book confidential film aims to upgrade the comics image
78

LETTERS:
THE LAST WORD
secret of breaking into comics: read *comics interview*
90

"I've always conceived of this movie as

SAM HAMM

When the news broke that Sam Hamm would be writing the BATMAN screenplay, not much notice was taken. We had pretty much come to believe that there never really would be a BATMAN movie, it had been in the works so long, had passed through so many hands, and didn't seem any closer to being done than when it had first been announced. But then things started happening, it seemed that the BATMAN project was finally getting underway — and when we decided to find out who to thank, guess who the prime suspect turned out to be . . .

JEFF GELB: *Let me start some what chronologically here, because frankly outside of reading a whole bunch of stories about your becoming involved in the BATMAN project, I don't know much about you. How long have you been a screenwriter?*

SAM HAMM: I've been earning a living at it more or less since 1979 actually, believe it or not.

JEFF: *Do you want to list some key projects along the way?*

SAM: Oh, let's see, the first thing I managed to sell was a script that was bought by **Jay Presson Allen** of New York, called THE NEXT BIG THING. From there she put me on NEVER CRY WOLF, which is the only *credit* I have so far, which she and her husband were both involved in. I came in initially to do a quickie rewrite, which ended up dragging on for about eight months of arctic hell.

JEFF: *What was the name of the guy who directed that?*

SAM: **Carroll Ballard** — where is he now! *(Laughter.)* He's still out here somewhere.

JEFF: *So, you actually did go up there?*

SAM: Oh, yes. It was one of those deals, you know, where I write the scene at 6:00 a.m. and they start shooting at 8:15. *(Laughter.)* And after that I did a quick version of a horror movie for a friend of mine, which never really had a title and which never really got produced, so it's of very little consequence. And then finding myself unemployable on the heels of the release of NEVER CRY WOLF, I wrote a spec script called PULITZER PRIZE which got into a sort of miniature bidding war. There were about six or seven places that wanted to do it, and it wound up at Columbia — the two final bidders were Columbia and Warner Brothers — and so I wound up doing PULITZER PRIZE at Columbia. After that was finished I hooked up with Warners for a two-year term deal, during which time I wrote a basketball recruiting comedy called HANG TIME. That was followed by BATMAN —

JEFF: *This comes as part of your contract to Warners?*

SAM: Yes.

JEFF: *That's interesting. Who made the*

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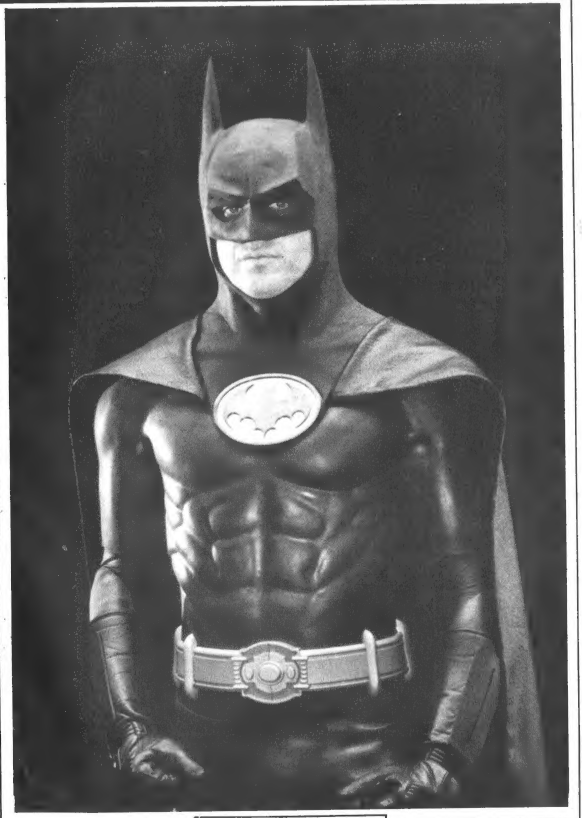
a really, really dark deadpan comedy."



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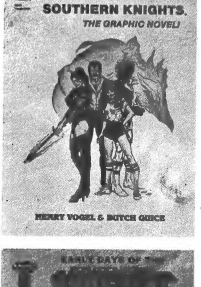

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"It didn't seem that BATMAN would be all that hard to do."

Jerry Ordway's artwork from DC Comics' adaptation of the movie.

choice of yourself, was it Ed Pressman?

SAM: Ed Pressman, as far as I know, has never been *involved* with BATMAN.

JEFF: *I beg your pardon, who is the guy that I'm thinking of then?*

SAM: Guber-Peters?

JEFF: *I guess you better walk me through it.* (Laughter.) *Who was involved in this project?*

SAM: The deal was that BATMAN had been sitting around for quite awhile at Warner Brothers, and I was aware of it — it was very much a back-burner thing, because a bunch of directors had come and gone on it. Just in the course of sniffing around in people's offices, I managed to glom onto a copy of the **Tom Mankiewicz** script. They didn't want to take that approach, obviously, but it didn't seem to me that BATMAN would be all that hard to do, so I started sniffing around to see what the status of it was, basically. One of the executives on the project was my close friend and sort of sponsor at Warner Brothers, **Bonni Lee** — and she bore the same relationship to **Tim Burton,** she was the one who had kind of brought him into Warner Brothers.

JEFF: *What's her position there?*

SAM: She was then a vice president in charge of creative affairs; she has since jumped over to Universal where she is now the president of **Redford's** two companies, Wildwood and Northfork. So, I just started asking around what the status of BATMAN was. I had had some meetings with **Guber-Peters** and they were throwing ideas for projects at me, and I sort of threw back, "Well, what's going on with this BATMAN thing you guys are supposed to be doing?"

JEFF: *Did they buy rights to the project or something?*

SAM: Yes. The situation as I understand it is fairly tangled. Initially, **Michael Uslan** and **Daniel Melnicker** had brought the project in to Warner Brothers, and before I came on it, it had sort of been shepherded over to **Guber-Peters.** I believe **Guber-Peters** at the time had a "first look" deal with Warners, and that's where BATMAN was set up. So, after a few months of asking around and trying to establish that I was *interested* in the thing, basically what happened was that Bonni kind of got the word around — and the project was just about *dead* in the water, they were thinking about taking it somewhere else.

At this point, I hooked up with **Tim Burton,** who had recently come on as director following PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE. The first time I met him

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"The project was just about dead in the water."

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he said, "Would you mind coming over to my office some day if you get time?" So the next time I was in L.A. I went over to his office, and he said, "Would you be interested in taking a whack at BATMAN?" I said, "Yeah, you bet."

JEFF: *And this was after you had read the Mankiewicz script, right?*

SAM: Yes.

JEFF: *What was that like by comparison to what you've ended up with? Was there a different flavor or tone to it?*

SAM: Yes. It was really very much like SUPERMAN, that's the closest analogue. It was beat for beat like SUPERMAN very much, in terms of structure, in terms of the sort of atmosphere of it. The Joker was much more of a comical figure, the action scenes were more overblown and outlandish, very much more comic-bookie with giant props and things like that.

JEFF: *What kind of instructions did you get when you were going into it, about the tone that they wanted?*

SAM: Basically none. We came in and described what we saw doing with it. I essentially just wanted to play the story straight, and that sounded fine to Warner Brothers. The only thing that they really told us was to include the Joker and include Robin.

JEFF: *Who since has fallen by the wayside?*

SAM: Right, who since has been smoothly removed.

JEFF: *(Laughter.) Is that, like, relegated to the second film or something?*

SAM: Yeah, presumably. Only the Joker turned out to be hard and fast.

JEFF: *But other than that they didn't say that they wanted you to stay away from camp, or that they wanted it to be humorous or anything, they just said give this a whack?*

"Where they had gotten messed up before was

SAM: Yes, basically. We came in and the way we described it, we obviously weren't trying to go the same route as the TV series. I had sat down with Tim and the *first* thing we talked about was that we wanted to do it straight, and scary and psychological and all this kind of stuff. Where I think they had gotten messed up before was trying to go by the SUPERMAN structure, which is you introduce young eight-year-old Bruce Wayne, you show his parents getting killed, you do like a 15 or 20 minute montage as he goes to criminology school and works out on the high rings and the parallel bars.

My feeling was since the story of how he came to *be* Batman doesn't *really* demand a whole lot of explanation — it's not this guy who's flying around or anything like that, it's essentially a regular guy dressed up in a suit — I wanted to sort of start the movie *outside* of using Bruce Wayne as the viewpoint character, treat Batman as a *fait accompli*, as a mysterious figure, and gradually work backward into the plot where you discover that he is Bruce Wayne and why he's doing what he's doing and all that kind of stuff.

JEFF: *What kind of research did you do before you started writing BATMAN? Were you a longtime comics collector or a fan or anything of that sort?*

SAM: Yeah, I was pretty much super-saturated with the stuff from my childhood. I used to buy most of the DC superhero comics, all of the Marvels, and I was pretty familiar with the basic premises of the strip. When I started reading comic books it was around 1959 or 1960 and Batman was in a pretty dry phase, the kind of material they were doing was like he travels back in time and meets the Aztec Batman. *(Laughter.)* Or he's got to thwart a pink alien from outer space. But the stuff that I really responded to when I was a kid was the stuff that they reprinted in the 80 PAGE GIANTs, stuff from the late '40s, early '50s, which had a much more pulpy and *noir*-ish tone to it — a lot of disfigured villains in the DICK TRACY vein. That was the stuff that excited me about the character when I was a kid.

JEFF: *I would imagine, though, that at some point you kind of dropped out, or were you actually still reading the book when you decided to do the script?*

SAM: To tell you the truth, I had stopped reading comics in the early '70s when I was still a teenager, and hadn't really gone back to them since. So I just started looking around, I think the first issue of DARK KNIGHT had just come out when I was first discussing the possibility of doing the screenplay. I went into the comics stores to see what was going on in the field about then, and I was pretty *staggered!* There were all of these guys who had cropped up in the interim who I thought were doing pretty fantastic work, and there was every reason to get excited over the stuff again.

JEFF: *Did you choose to incorporate anything that you had read in this research time, of catching up with the comics that you read, into the screenplay that you wrote? Are people who see the film going to see a little bit of THE DARK KNIGHT in there?*

SAM: Well, I think unavoidably there will be a bit of DARK KNIGHT in the *tone*. We were trying to figure out, you know, how to handle the world of Gotham City, and we both kind of simultaneously seized on BRAZIL as a kind of visual model, as having a kind of really interesting — I don't know what term you would use — retro-futurist look! *(Laughter.)* But the idea that we liked was the movie would set in the present day, but it would be set in a Gotham City which was in its *look* fairly far removed from anything which is out there at the moment. It will be a kind of nightmarish Gotham City, like if you had gone back to the '40s and taken a projection of what the 1980s or the 1990s would look like. So it's at once kind of gothic and futuristic.

JEFF: *So, in that sense there is some of*

From part one (of three), Hamm teamed with artist Cowan & Giordano for issue #598 of DETECTIVE COMICS.

trying to go by the SUPERMAN structure."

the tone of the series. How about any of the ideas of characterization or, you know, just what this character of Batman is like?

SAM: Well, actually, there are a couple of, like, literal swipes from DARK KNIGHT — a couple of lines of dialogue . . . I think from the *final* script the only bit which has really made it in is the notion that he wears the emblem on his chest as a *target*, essentially, because he's trying to draw fire away from his head. There were a couple of other bits like that, but really there wasn't a whole lot that we could use in terms of plot and characterization, because DARK KNIGHT takes place with this 60-year-old Batman who has sort of come back for his swan song.

JEFF: *Did you go back to any of the '70s books by either Denny O'Neil or Steve Englehart?*

SAM: **Denny O'Neil's** stuff was coming out right about when I stopped reading comic books, I remember **Neal Adams** and **Jim Aparo** were doing the strip when I stopped reading it, and I wasn't familiar with the **Englehart** stuff at all — but **Jenette Kahn**, once I did come on the project, sent us a package of the reprinted **Englehart** material, I guess from a stretch of DETECTIVE COMICS that he had done. The **Mankiewicz** draft had been based on the supporting characters from that series, which I hadn't realized. I had presumed that Silver St. Cloud and the Gotham City mayor, whatever his name was, and all of those characters were essentially **Tom Mankiewicz's** invention, I hadn't even realized that they were part of the series.

JEFF: *So actually . . . up until that time were you aware of Steve Englehart's contribution to the film?*

SAM: No, the first time that I knew that he had written treatments for the film — and I don't know if the treatments were written for Warner or for DC, *what* the deal was — but the first time I heard about it was when I was talking to **Denny O'Neil** about this anniversary comic which I've recently done. I had mentioned one possible plotline and he said, "Oh, that's kind of like **Englehart's** treatment for the movie." I didn't realize he had written one. It sounds weird, and he may well have written stuff at Warner Brothers' behest, I don't know, and it sounds strange; but in terms of how the movie business really works, it's not. Nobody ever *showed* me, actually, any of the **Mankiewicz** drafts, or the treatment that **Tim Burton** had done with **Julie Hickson.** That was stuff that I just sort of

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"The idea was to do a big, flashy, and stylized violent story."

sniffed out on my own.

JEFF: *So, there had been several drafts but they didn't make any of them available to you, but you ended up having read some of them anyway?*

SAM: Right, right. It's one of those deals, I think, where they say, "Oh, don't read what we've got because it'll just screw you up." But there are ways to put your hands on things.

JEFF: *So, it'll be nice for everybody reading this to know that when you went into the project with Tim you both had the idea of making it a more serious film, because needless to say the signing of Michael Keaton got everyone worried. How many drafts did you go through to craft the final version?*

SAM: I went through five, and those have since been rewritten by other hands.

JEFF: *Through all of your screenplays, and as far as you know the subsequent ones, did they all maintain the serious flavor?*

SAM: Absolutely. In tone it's essentially the same movie that it was when we first started talking about it. The idea was always to do a big, flashy and — in a stylized way — violent story.

JEFF: *What is the movie supposed to be rated, by the way? PG-13?*

SAM: Well, we want to hang onto the core audience, of course, so we've thrown in a lot of hard-core stuff, it'll probably be XXX. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, I imagine it'll be PG-13.

JEFF: *In any case, can we say, for people who are worried, that this will be more of a serious film than people might expect from some of the names of the players involved?*

SAM: Yes, absolutely. I think anybody that's seen the preview that's kicked around in theaters, anybody who's *concerned*, is going to breathe a sigh of relief. It's obviously not being played for yucks.

JEFF: *Have you been on the set?*

SAM: I haven't been over there. I had a little falling out with Warner Brothers and the production in particular when I refused to work during the writers strike, which struck those guys as the *height* of ingratitude. So no, I didn't even get a trip to England out of this deal — I'm a bitter man. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Your impression, though, is that we are going to have a serious film?*

SAM: Yes.

JEFF: *With perhaps some lighter moments?*

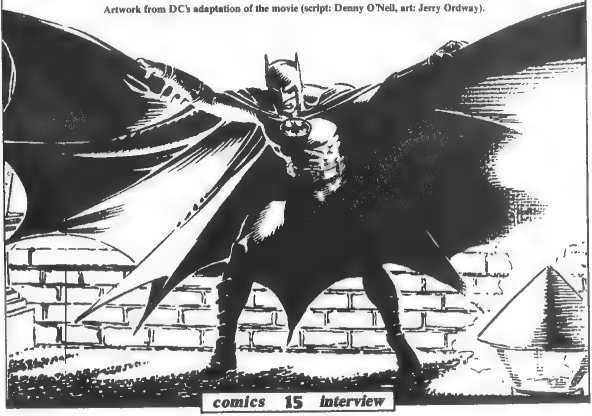
SAM: Well, yeah, there's going to be, certainly, comic *things* in it. The Joker's schtick is very funny. To my mind it's really been — this is not to scare anybody off — but I've always conceived of this movie as sort of a really really dark deadpan comedy. In other words, it's not anything that's going to *play* as comic, but the premise that we've got is that there is a millionaire who puts on a costume to go out and fight crime, you know. He discovers that not only is this very very dangerous, but it starts to seriously screw up his love life. That, to me, is an inherently comic premise — but it's played out in very straight and serious terms. We wanted to hit on what all the *implications* of that situation would be. So, while I think that the basic concept is that it's a very very dark comedy, the actual experience of watching it and the way in which it plays is not going to be necessarily comic at all.

And, you know, the Joker has a lot of — what I hope, anyway — highly entertaining schtick. And, too, the Joker is played as a psychotic. The idea is not in that he is a joker*ette* or that he's some kind of comedian, but really that he's a wild card. He's totally unpredictable. He's perfectly capable of murdering someone without giving it a second thought. He sees things in fairly comic and ironic terms.

JEFF: *Now, did you write at least one version of the screenplay* after *Nicholson was announced?*

SAM: No, I haven't had anything to do with the script since the casting came in.

Artwork from DC's adaptation of the movie (script: Denny O'Neil, art: Jerry Ordway).



"The Joker is responsible for the

Above, below and at right (bottom): The origin retold by Miller/Janson.

But the situation was that everybody knew all *along* that *Nicholson* was the main guy that they wanted, so I certainly tried to hear his voice when I was doing the character.

JEFF: *How much did the screenplay change from draft one to draft five? I can envision huge changes, or maybe they were more cosmetic than that?*

SAM: Yes, that's really the case. The plot structure has remained more or less intact from the first version. It still is, even with the changes that have been done by other people. I think you could read the first draft and go out and see the movie six months later and not realize that there had been that many changes made. There are a lot of things that have been taken out of it that I miss, and there are a lot of things that are in there that I'm not particularly *keen* on, but —

JEFF: *What's the missing scene that you really miss the most?*

SAM: Oh, gee! *(Laughter.)* There were actually, believe it or not, a couple of good scenes with Robin, who got dropped into the story rather precipitously at the end of the second act. And there are also just bits and things all of the way through. I had what *I* thought was a really kind of an exciting and ingenious way to introduce the bat signal, and that's been dropped.

JEFF: *Is there no bat signal in the film?*

SAM: Yes, there is a bat signal, but it's not the scene I wrote. And there are bits and things all the way through, a lot of stuff just having to do with Bruce's character, which I don't think in the latest versions is quite as dark and obsessive as *mine* had been. There was — actually it's sort of a running gag which has more or less been dropped from the screenplay —essentially everybody that he comes in contact with puts two and two together and realizes that Bruce Wayne is Batman. *(Laughter.)* And then that knowledge gets thwarted in various ways. But that has been sort of eliminated. And as far as things that have been added, the only one that I find really kind of grotesque and vulgar is that they have made the Joker responsible for the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents. That, to my mind, is a bit of a stretch — and it changes the psychological premises the story is based on.

JEFF: *Yeah, I'd say so. That's pure Hollywood thinking, isn't it — "Make it symmetrical."*

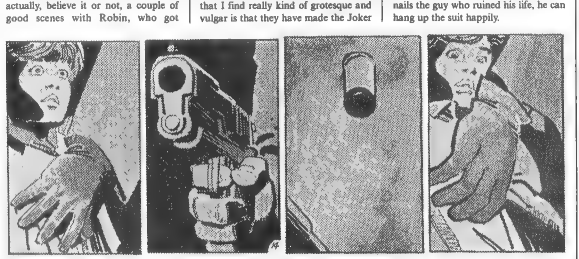
SAM: Absolutely. They *think* that it gives the story a certain kind of unity. Not only is it a terrible plot stretch, but it allows Batman to resolve its initial trauma easily.

JEFF: *And actually that's the heart of it, isn't it?*

SAM: Yes. It turns the story into more of a sort of DEATH WISH thing, where a guy goes out and gets revenge for having been *wronged.*

JEFF: *And the point, which I'm surprised they can't figure out themselves, is the character loses his entire motivation once he destroys that one person.*

SAM: Exactly. My feeling is once he nails the guy who ruined his life, he can hang up the suit happily.



murder of Bruce Wayne's parents."

JEFF: *Exactly!*

SAM: But, as you said, that's a perfect example of an idea that sounds good to executives. But it doesn't really make a whale of a lot of sense if you bother getting into it.

JEFF: *What is your experience with the producers in terms of their reverence for the character? Did they have any?*

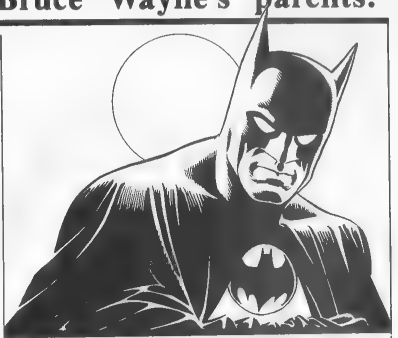
SAM: I really can't say. I haven't had a whole lot of . . . the situation was everybody sort of really *liked* the script, which was a bizarre experience for me. *(Laughter.)* I'm one of those guys who is *constantly* being told that the main character is not sympathetic enough and that sort of things, so I wrote a script with a lead character who to my mind is a flat-out psychotic, and it was the first thing I've ever written where nobody had any sympathy problems — which raises some disturbing questions. *(Laughter.)* But as far as that goes, I really can't say. My contact was more with Tim and with the Warner Brothers executives.

JEFF: *What about Tim, then, what were his feelings about the character?*

SAM: I think he has taken the character very seriously all of the way through, in terms of wanting to explore the basic situation of "why does this guy *do* this?" In terms of his actual involvement with the character, I don't know. I know that he first became fascinated with the character from the TV series — not that that's the route that he wanted to take making the movie, but I don't think that he's a real die-hard comic-book person *per se*.

JEFF: *Did you guys ever discuss the comics when you were working on this? Did you pull out a couple of issues of more recent DARK KNIGHT-type stuff and go over them with him?*

SAM: Not really. I have to tell you, Tim



Ordway: art from the adaptation of the film

really admires THE KILLING JOKE but he's not that keen on THE DARK KNIGHT. I like THE DARK KNIGHT considerably better than he does.

JEFF: *But he is aware of them?*

SAM: Oh, yes — everybody in the world seems to be. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *What was your feeling of your sense of responsibility to the character? Did you go into it saying you wanted to do it in a different way than it's been done before? What was your recognition of what you had to do to make this right?*

SAM: I thought that it was a great responsibility. What you wind up doing when you're putting an existing character in a major Hollywood film is you're essentially *defining* that character for a whole generation of people; and most people have certainly heard of Batman, but they are probably not that familiar with it. So what you're doing becomes sort of *ipso facto* canonical. That was something that I was very, very conscious of. The thing that I decided early on was that I wanted really to do what would be a really, really cool Batman story that would be as good as the way you *remember* the comics being from when you were a kid.

JEFF: *And you had the advantage of actually having read them as a kid.*

SAM: Yes, absolutely. It's not so much a matter of trying to go back and lift things from specific stories and all that kind of stuff, it's just trying to capture the

"I wrote a script with a lead character

Another portion from Sam's "Blind Justice" multi-part story from DETECTIVE COMICS #598 (art by Cowan, Giordano & McLaughlin).

atmosphere. And the thing that I found, going back and looking at a lot of the stories, especially the ones that I read when I was little, was that our memories tend to be a lot *darker* than those stories actually were. Batman was sort of a nice, well-adjusted guy, good citizen, beloved by all, and all of this kind of stuff, and people tend to remember the character as being a lot darker and more sinister.

And the other thing is . . . like, how many Batmans are there? A character who's been around for 50 years has obviously gone through a lot of transformations, because you simply can't stay *current* in the public's mind unless you do that. Batman, as have all the comic-book characters, I guess, has been tailored to fit the time.

JEFF: *Yeah, and the thing about the medium itself is that since by its own nature you're going to run through a lot of different creators, each one will have his own vision of the character.*

SAM: Exactly. Every generation there's going to be another bunch of people who come in and have a whole lot of ideas about "wouldn't it be cool if Batman was this, did this, etc., etc." I think that's a very healthy thing . . . I mean, that's just a natural part of the process. And so as far as doing a *particular* Batman, that never really entered my mind because I didn't think there was *one* Batman to do. And fans are concerned about what the interpretation of the character is going to be —

JEFF: *Right, very!*

SAM: Well, if I did the Batman that I first started reading when I was a kid, who made the first and strongest impression on me, he would be travelling back in time to meet the Aztecs, and fighting pink aliens. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Thankfully, you didn't use that one.*

SAM: No, we didn't go that route, as tempting as it was.

JEFF: *Does your version of the character carry a gun?*

SAM: He doesn't carry a gun *per se*. I was at the World Science Fiction Convention and they were showing slides of his various weapons and gadgets, and the batwing — our version of the batplane — came up on the screen. **Jeff Walker,** the Warner Brothers publicist, mentioned

who is a flat-out psychotic."

that it was outfitted with rocket launchers, machine guns, etc., etc., so somebody jumped up in the back of the room and said, "Do you mean Batman is going to be using a *gun!*" As if to say, "Uh-oh, the canon has been violated."

JEFF: *Right. But in your version there is none?*

SAM: Well, no. He has guns mounted on the plane because the plane is essentially an attack craft, but he doesn't carry a handgun. The thing I said to the guy was, you know, if you want to go back to the roots of the character, back to when he was created, he *did* carry a gun. In the early comics, before the character had really gelled, there are scenes where he's pulling out the old .38 automatic and popping guys.

JEFF: *Right. Now, does your Batman kill anyone in the film?*

SAM: He . . . there are people who get killed in action scenes, but it's not through Batman's direct agency — let's put it that way. There are guys who in the process of trying to kill Batman get killed themselves, but it's not because he has set out to do a job on them.

JEFF: *He's not directly responsible?*

SAM: No. His code is basically pretty much intact, I think.

JEFF: *Now, I haven't read your screenplay so I have no idea exactly what —*

SAM: You must be the only comics guy on the North American continent who hasn't! *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Is there a fairly climactic confrontation between Batman and the Joker in the end — does one leave alive and the other doesn't, or is it wide open for a sequel?*

SAM: Oh, yeah, absolutely — there's a huge confrontation, the Batman gets killed and the Joker goes on to make sequel after sequel. *(Laughter.)* People who have either seen the screenplay or have heard about it get very concerned because we appear to be killing off one of the major characters, but as I point out, they did that to Dracula and the Wolfman in every installment of the series and it didn't bother their consciences too much to bring them back.

JEFF: *Which is the exact same thing in comics, by the way.*

SAM: Yeah, you're dead until somebody gets stuck for a story and says, "Hey, wouldn't it be great if we brought back Clayface!"

JEFF: *What about weaponry? Were you told to create certain things that could perhaps be useful in merchandising later, or did you just use things that were good for the story?*

"Tim Burton became fascinated with

Photo: Terry O'Ne... /Sygma/ Warner Bros./DC Comics, Inc.

Tim Burton, director of The BATMAN Movie. This photo was originally reproduced in the New York Times (magazine)

SAM: Not at all. The approach that I took was to put him into a scrape and then try to figure what he would use to get out, then give him whatever was going to be convenient at the moment So he's got a pretty full arsenal.

JEFF: *Is it the usual utility belt sort of stuff?*

SAM: Yes, he's got his utility belt, and

the character from the TV series."

he's got a small handful of things that will be new and exciting. One thing that we get some mileage out of is . . . you know, you always see Batman down on the street and he throws up a batarang, and suddenly he's like 40 stories up — gravity doesn't work that way! *(Laughter.)* Well, one thing that he has on his utility belt is a sort of a spring-action reel, so he can like throw the batarang up around a catwalk or whatever, hit a switch, and the reel yanks him up into the air like a fish on a line.

JEFF: *That's nice. Well, one thing I'm curious about is, let's face it, you wrote a screenplay that involves characters that can be merchandised — did you get any instructions about things that they wanted you to use so, hopefully, they could build a whole line of toys around later, anything like that?*

SAM: Not at all. I'm sure that they will have the toys, but we didn't get any specific demands from the marketing department or anything like that. It might have been *somebody's* main consideration at some point, but by the time we were turning in drafts I think it was pretty obvious to everybody that there was going to be *plenty* of shit to market. At one point, one executive did say, "We need more utility belt in here!" *(Laughter.)* So I went through the draft with the guy and said, "Look, he pulls *something* out of the utility belt every scene he's in, it happens like three times per scene! Let's face it, if he did any more he'd have to trade in the utility belt for a U-Haul!" *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Is this a wisecracking sort of Batman, or is he the strong, silent type?*

SAM: He will get off exchanges with the Joker, but it's not like you throw an egg at a guy and say, "The yolk's on you!" — if you get my drift. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Glad to hear that. Did you envision this as such a big budget film when you drafted the screenplay?*

SAM: No, actually I'm kind of shocked at what it has blossomed into. Warner Brothers was very concerned about the cost all along, they wanted to keep the below-the-line costs at about $20 to $22 million at the outside. To tell you the truth, I actually thought it was a fairly cheap script to do. There wasn't a whole lot in the way of *spectacular* special effects scenes. There were a couple of pretty big scenes, and obviously the sets and everything like that were going to be fairly expensive, but I didn't see a whole lot in there in terms of really huge ticket stuff — no earthquakes, no floods, no stuff like that . . . boy, movies sure do cost a lot of money. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *What's the current ticket on that?*

SAM: I really can't say. I understand that it's very high — almost all of the estimates that I've seen in print are substantially lower than what I've heard.

JEFF: *Oh? I've heard up to $40 million. Are you saying it could be more than that?*

SAM: *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Let's just say we hope the film makes some money. It's hard to imagine how the film could perform to expectations when you have to make at* least *three times production expenses to make a penny, and that's a big knot.*

SAM: Yes, I agree, when you have that kind of enormous overhead . . . but, you know, the cast alone, when they decided to go the route that they went, you're adding many, many, many millions of dollars onto the price of the picture.

JEFF: *Were you the person who came up with the body armor approach to the costume?*

SAM: Well, the body armor stuff is one of the snatches from DARK KNIGHT. Batman is falling through midair at one point and hopes his body armor holds, and I thought that was a very, very useful idea, in terms of how to do this character. Of course, the problem that you have

"He doesn't carry a gun *per se*."

with a superhero movie is, you know, why don't they just shoot the guy! When he corners a crook and he's standing ten feet away, no matter how quick his reflexes are a goon has *plenty* of time to shoot him before the batarang or whatever comes out.

So, in the very first scene we're trying to establish Batman as this sort of mythical, almost supernatural figure who is *rumored* to exist and has got the underworld in a panic, but whose actual presence no one has ever confirmed. Virtually the first thing that happens is he lands on a roof and a guy turns around and shoots him twice squarely in the chest, knocks him down, and as the crook is about to grab his swag and make a run for it, he looks back over his shoulder and the guy's coming back at him again. When you sit down and try to work out the grit, the nuts and bolts of how the guy does what he does, you have to ask questions — why doesn't he get shot, why doesn't he get his ribs kicked in. **Frank Miller's** solution seemed like the most logical one.

JEFF: *You're right, otherwise it becomes really tough to explain why he would put a costume on at all.*

SAM: Yes, absolutely. The costume, fine, it's designed to frighten people and all of this kind of stuff — although that, to my mind, is fairly debatable. I always wanted to have a scene — it's the sort of thing that never worked its way in there — but I always wanted to have a scene where having established that the Batman wears his costume because "criminals are a cowardly superstitious lot," we would then introduce Dick Grayson in his Robin costume, his little red vest and green trunks and bare legs and yellow cape, and Batman says, "Yeah, that'll scare the hell out of them." *(Laughter.)* Maybe in the sequel.

JEFF: *How do you feel about the casting?*

SAM: I feel **Nicholson** is great, the supporting characters have been cast really well, and as far as the great Batman controversy, I'm taking a wait-and-see approach. **Michael Keaton** is certainly not the way that I ever conceived of the character. But I could sort of see it working, and I could see it being played in an interesting way. I'm more or less at peace with it now, anyway.

JEFF: *Did you change or use your own origin for the Joker, or use something that had been used in the comics before?*

SAM: The Joker's origin is pretty much as it was in the comics. It's the same schtick with the fall into the vat of toxins, he gets dumped out into the river, etc., etc. We don't use the Red Hood schtick

"Why don't they just shoot the guy!"

because, you know, in *this* world there are no costumed heroes or costumed villains prior to the advent of Batman and the Joker. That's one very important tonal thing, and it seems to be the sort of thing that's really unavoidable when you're doing a movie — you have to treat these guys as a bizarre phenomenon. In other words, they don't exist in the standing DC Universe where you've got Superman and Wonder Woman and Hawkman and Aquaman.

JEFF: *This by no means is defining a DC Universe on film?*

SAM: No, absolutely not. You know, the basic fact is most people don't read comic books, so it wouldn't make any sense to them. It *starts* to make sense when you've been reading a lot of comic books and you understand the conventions of the genre, and you realize that there are certain expectations to maintain month after month and you can have characters crossing over and all of this kind of stuff. But our idea is that there's a Batman in the world, and then there's a Joker, and that's that. It's enough of a nightmare getting one guy into a bizarre costume, you definitely don't want to get a whole raft of them.

JEFF: *Well, one thing that's lucky about that is, if they actually do more of these films, that quite a few of his better villains weren't far afield of plain people who were disfigured — like you were saying, DICK TRACY-type villains.*

SAM: Exactly, absolutely. That's another appealing thing about Batman. The stuff with the Joker . . . the Joker *dresses* flamboyantly, but you don't have to go through the whole rigmarole of "here's another guy who decided it would be cool to put on a costume."

JEFF: *Did you incorporate any of the background of THE KILLING JOKE into the character?*

SAM: No, THE KILLING JOKE was not around when we started doing this. I did get a copy of **Alan Moore's** enormously *dense* manuscript for THE KILLING JOKE about a month or two months into the writing. But the thing that was very important to me was trying to *ground* this stuff in a simple and understandable movie reality, not even so much for an audience but for studio people, to establish a kind of existing reality that everybody could get their hands around and understand. So we've got a fairly ordinary gangster plot, basically — crime lords and all of that kind of stuff — and the tone is more GODFATHEResque or FRENCH CONNECTIONesque, or something of that nature, than like the usual world of super villains and mad geniuses and that sort of thing.

JEFF: *Well, it all sounds very exciting. How much input did DC have, if any?*

SAM: DC was great. That's one of the things that pleased me terrifically, was that they got very excited over the script — and I started corresponding, and later met with, **Jenette Kahn,** and later on in the game, **Denny O'Neil** and those guys. Jenette had forwarded to me a sort of Batmanifesto — you know, various aspects of what they thought BATMAN should be — and I went through it going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course, how else would you do it!" And we also got a memo from **Bob Kane** detailing the same kind of stuff. But the fact is that what DC wanted us to do was pretty much what we were doing already, so there was never any real area of conflict. I got a set of notes from Jenette on the first draft, where she felt that some of the things that Batman had done were too brutal and he wouldn't do this, and I thought about it and realized she was right and went back and changed those things in the subsequent drafts.

JEFF: *How much input did Bob Kane have?*

SAM: Well, again, it's not so much . . . all of the stuff that I'm talking about is really coming after the fact. I was already in mid-draft with the plot worked out when we started getting these things, and it was stuff that was sent in and got forwarded to me by various executives. Reading **Bob Kane's** memo I thought, "Great, he's going to be really pleased!"

JEFF: *Have you heard, has he read any of your drafts?*

"Michael Keaton is certainly not the way

SAM: Yes. He's been very keen, and very complimentary, about this stuff.

JEFF: *Great. Well, let's drift off here — you've written three issues of DETECTIVE COMICS, is it?*

SAM: Yes.

JEFF: *How did that come about?*

SAM: Well, they were sort of looking around for, basically, a big stunt for Batman's anniversary, and I had talked to Jenette, and had just written a thank you note to **Denny O'Neil** because he'd done an interview in which he talked about how much he liked the BATMAN script and said, "If **Sam Hamm** ever wants to write comics, he should give me a call." Then the writers strike came about in the spring of last year, and it happened to coincide with the time when DC was doing their preparation for the big anniversary issue, so — at whose behest I don't know — I got essentially a conference call from Jenette and Denny, asking if I would have any interest in writing the story for the 50th anniversary of Batman. *(Laughter.)* You know, it was the sort of thing that had never occurred to me as something to do, but it struck me as the kind of thing if you were offered you couldn't *possibly* turn it down! My boyhood dream was to write and draw comic books!

JEFF: *They were lucky they found a screenwriter who actually had that boyhood dream, as opposed to somebody just hacking something out. They lucked out, as far as I'm concerned. I don't imagine that there are that many screenwriters around who had that dream.*

SAM: I think there are more than you might expect. I know that **Eddie Newmeier** and **Michael Miner** perceived ROBOCOP very much in terms of JUDGE DREDD and all of the British science-fiction comics from the late '70s and early '80s. So I think there *are* those guys around.

JEFF: *That's great. But just the same, it gave DC something to latch onto for the anniversary celebration. For you, what was the experience like?*

SAM: Well, I was just flattered out of my mind, to begin with. The thing that I discovered when I actually got into it was that writing for comics — at least the way that *I* was doing it, and understand there are many different methods — I thought it was much, much more *demanding* than doing a simple script where you write a scene like "they do this, they say this." In movies you very rarely say what the camera's going to be pointed at, what you're going to see in the shot . . .

More from Sam Hamm's "Blind Justice" story (DETECTIVE COMICS #599).

that I ever conceived of the character."

JEFF: *Because that's more the director's job?*

SAM: Yeah, essentially. It's weird in that regard, in comics, because you don't *really* become the director, you go through a stage . . . I guess it's closer to becoming a storyboard artist. The artist — and we've got a very good one, **Denys Cowan** — takes what you've got there and sort of runs with it, and he worries about the design of the page and the balance of the panel and all of that kind of stuff — it's sort of like you're a little director sidekick or something. But you do have to figure everything out in advance, because there are a lot of considerations. You have to break it down into narrative units of "you see this on the page, you see this on the next page, try to arrange it so that when you turn the page there's a climax." There were all sorts of questions, pacing, breakdowns, how much information can you cram into the frame.

JEFF: *It was a harder assignment than you thought it would be?*

SAM: Absolutely. I have the best respect for the guys who crank this stuff out month after month.

JEFF: *Did you come away from it feeling like you did the job you wanted to do? Are you pleased with it?*

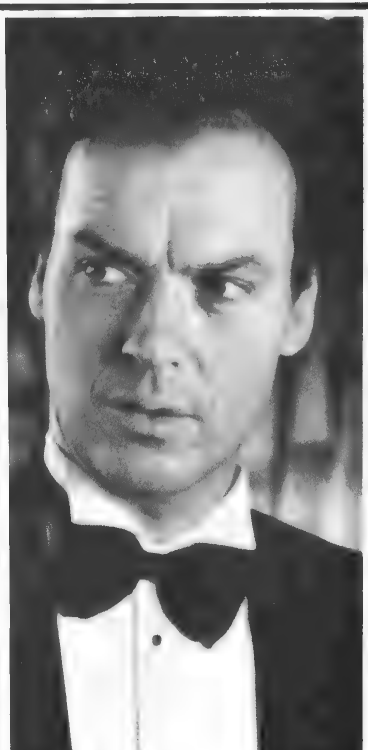
SAM: Yes, I'm pretty much pleased with it. I went in . . . it was the sort of thing where I didn't want to come in and try to do some sort of *definitive* Batman thing; it's not like I wanted to do a DARK KNIGHT which, in a certain way, would close the book on the character. It's three issues of DETECTIVE COMICS, a regular sequence of a monthly comic, and it's in the continuity of what's going on every month, so my ambition was no more than to write a really good stretch of DETECTIVE COMICS. I think they're pretty good.

JEFF: *Would you have any interest in following through on that with another set of scripts at some point?*

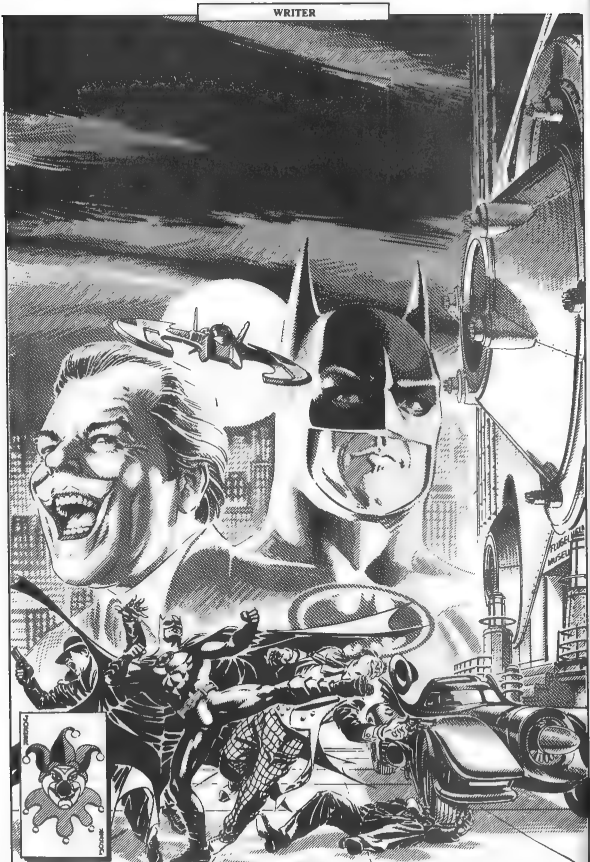
SAM: Yeah, I wouldn't be averse to it. The problem that I have is that I'm a relatively slow writer and it is very time consuming, and I'm swallowed up right now with other movie projects. But I could see, if I got some time clear, trying to do something like that again.

JEFF: *Did you present them with a story idea, or did they present you with a concept and you fleshed it out?*

SAM: I basically just called Denny up and we bounced around a few ideas. He said one thing they were interested in was nobody had ever done anything on what Bruce Wayne had done in the years prior



Michael Keaton, minus his cape & cowl . . . as Bruce Wayne.



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"Jenette forwarded me a sort of Batmanifesto."

to his emergence as Batman. Another idea that he threw out was explaining where Old Man Thomas Wayne got his money, where the Wayne fortune comes from. So we just sort of schmoozed on it a little bit, and I basically plugged together old plot ideas I had sitting around —

JEFF: *Pink aliens and Aztecs?*

SAM: Right! *(Laughter.)* I was sort of coming up with a story independently, but the second issue is devoted primarily to Bruce Wayne's travels prior to becoming Batman. It's kind of unusual — nobody except **Denys Cowan** seems to have stumbled onto this fact, and I could be talking through my hat here — but as far as I know it may be the first issue of DETECTIVE COMICS since #26 in which the Batman himself does not make an appearance, because it's all Bruce Wayne.

JEFF: *I have no idea, but you're probably right.*

SAM: I've been trying to figure out what they're going to put on the cover. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *They'll think of something — they'll put a bat-eared shadow in the background.* (Laughter.) *Or the bat signal.*

SAM: That's the way to do it, yeah.

JEFF: *Well, what's going on with the WATCHMEN project? Did this come about as a direct result of BATMAN or what?*

SAM: I think it came about pretty much as a result of BATMAN. **Joel Silver** had acquired the rights to the comic book when it was first coming out, I think it was like only three issues old —

JEFF: *That's the guy I was trying to think of, way back when I said Ed Pressman.*

SAM: Okay, I'm with you now. Joel was looking around for a writer, he initially had approached **Alan Moore**, but Alan wisely wants nothing whatsoever to do with the movie business — *(Laughter.)* I applaud Alan's discrimination. So it was just sort of sitting around, they didn't know *what* they were going to do with it, it was very early in the process, and **Jenette Kahn** from DC told Joel to read the BATMAN script and see if I wouldn't be a good idea to take a crack at it — and Jenette had been sending me WATCHMEN.

So they called me up. WATCHMEN was fairly *staggering*. It's incredibly *dense* — it was mind-boggling *stuff*! I sat down one night at six, started going through it, and it was midnight by the time I got through the first five issues. I couldn't see

Poster art from the original "filmed" BATMAN (1943-44).

"Alan Moore wisely wants nothing

Cesar Romero as The Joker (from the TV show), circa 1966.

how anyone could turn it into a movie because 1) there's too much sprawl in the story, too much time shifting and flashbacks, and 2) there's too much expositional material to get across.

JEFF: *But you agreed to write it then, so how the heck did you figure it out? Is that screenplay done?*

SAM: Oh, yeah, the screen play is in and **Terry Gilliam** is apparently going to sign to direct it.

JEFF: *Wow! Well, how did you wrestle with this huge world, then, what you had to do with it?*

SAM: Well, it was really a terrible problem. I felt like it was going to require a certain amount of radical surgery, so I basically just girded my loins because I figured that if the WATCHMEN script got into circulation there would be as many fans alienated by that as had liked BATMAN. I took the project because I liked the comic books very much, I didn't want somebody who didn't coming in to fuck it up, and I wanted to see *if* I could do it, see if I could figure out a way to get it all kind of boiled down and distilled. The thing is, though, you wind up losing a lot of great material. I cut out all of the BLACK FREIGHTER stuff, obviously.

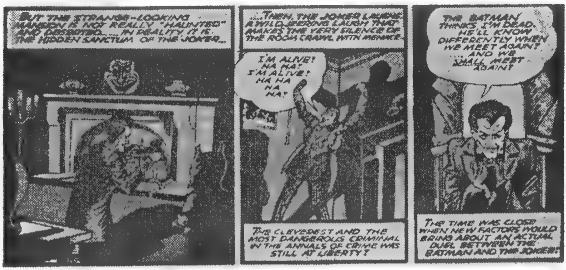
JEFF: *By necessity, sure.*

SAM: Yeah. I cut out all of the previous generation of superheroes, which was a harder decision, but I think an equally necessary one. The problem is converting a kind of post-modern comic book which is very self-reflective, which very much depends upon the fact that it's simultaneously a commentary on and a parody *of* comics in the form of a comic. The difficult and unfortunate thing that you wind up *having* to do is to convert the story from a kind of post-modern approach into a more of a classical kind of thing with a regular through-line.

JEFF: *I don't understand, through-line?*

SAM: A plot thread that you can follow all of the way through. That, to my mind, is why WATCHMEN of about 40 percent of what's *interesting* about it.

JEFF: *On the other hand, to an audience that isn't familiar with the comic — and*


BUT THE STRANGE-LOOKING MANSION IS NOT REALLY HAUNTED AND DESERTED... IN REALITY IT IS THE HIDDEN SANCTUM OF THE JOKER...
...THEN, THE JOKER LAUGHS A WILD, WEIRD LAUGH THAT MAKES THE VERY SILENCE EVEN MORE CRASH, WITH MENACE...
I'M ALIVE! HA HA HA! I'M ALIVE! HA HA HA HA!
THE CLEVEREST AND THE MOST DANGEROUS CRIMINAL IN THE ANNALS OF CRIME WAS STILL AT LIBERTY!
THE BATMAN THINKS, "I'M DEAD. HE'LL KNOW DIFFERENTLY WHEN WE MEET AGAIN! AND WE SHALL MEET AGAIN!"
THE TIME WAS CLOSE WHEN NEW FACTORS WOULD BRING ABOUT AN ACTUAL DUEL BETWEEN THE BATMAN AND THE JOKER!

Bob Kane's "The Case of The Joker's Crime Circus," 1941.

to do with the movie business."

let's face it, the ones that do know the comic are a small audience — is there enough there to make that a worthwhile experience for them?

SAM: Well, that's what I have been told. *(Laughter.)* The screenplay has gotten a really good response from people who aren't at all familiar with the comic books

JEFF: *Has Alan read it?*

SAM: Yes. Alan has read it. I think he was probably more disappointed than he let on. He was very gracious about it and said he thought I had done as good a job as anybody *could*, but I suspect that anybody who put that much love and effort into it, and who thought out the *architecture* of the thing that completely, that definitively, would be disappointed by my version. I feel like what I came in to do was essentially the writerly equivalent of what Kodak used to do, take elegant technology and dumb it down for mass consumption. I felt like that was what I *had* to do if there was going to be any kind of movie there at all.

JEFF: *Well, apparently, enough people must have agreed, if this thing is actually to the point of picking a director.*

SAM: Yeah, it seems to be plugging ahead

JEFF: *Which characters did you retain?*

SAM: All of the present day characters are intact — Dr. Manhattan, Nite Owl, Silk Spectre, Rorschach, the Comedian, Veidt

JEFF: *Did you retain their costumes?*

SAM: That's more of an art director's decision than mine, but the costumes do turn up. Actually, there is a prologue sequence . . . the nightmare of this story is that you have an awful lot of stuff to establish before the story can get underway. There's a huge amount of backstory that you can get away with in the comic books, but that's something you have to address *directly* in a movie. So we've got sort of a prologue showing the Watchmen in action, to establish 1) that the world is different, 2) that there are superheroes, and 3) that they are illegal now, and there's a reason for it.

JEFF: *Were you forced to change any of the story elements that are really specific to the series, will the conclusion or anything like that look really different to a reader, or were you able to retain most of everything he did in that regard?*

SAM: It's a new ending, a new beginning, and in most of the middle stuff I tried to be as faithful as I could be. There are some things that have been juggled around and reshuffled, and obviously there have to be scenes to just provide the

connective tissue, but the set pieces are all pretty much drawn directly from the comics. And the ending is different.

I was forwarded by Jenette a really nice letter from **Dave Gibbons,** who had some *localized* complaints and suggestions, but who basically was content with what was going on there. I would have been satisfied with a "well, it's not as bad as we thought it would be," but he was actually very enthusiastic about it. So I'm in the process of trying to write him back and thank him, and explain some of the choices that I made, and congratulate him for having come up with better scenes than I did, in some of his suggestions.

JEFF: *Well, I guess you've done it. Are you going to try for a triple play here, or are you going to dip out of comics for awhile?*

SAM: I'm going to take a rest for awhile. I've got a bunch of other stuff that I've got to get done before I would even be able to contemplate another one. I'm supposed to do a movie of THE AVENGERS, the TV show, and I guess that is about as close as you can get to comic-book material without having it be an actual comic book.

JEFF: *Well, if there were a sequel to BATMAN would you be involved?*

SAM: I can't say. Who knows?

JEFF: *Obviously — and this could all change the day the film comes out — but you've become the darling of the comics fans. Everyone hears that you've written a really good screenplay, reverent to the Batman.*

SAM: That's really extremely gratifying to me, I have to say. I'm sort of more excited about pleasing the people who have a genuine affection for the character, than I am about pleasing studio guys or people whose main idea is to make a whole pot of money off of the movie. I came out of reading comic books, and for better or for worse I think a large part of my *narrative* sense comes out of having read comic books religiously when I was a kid. So I'm really thrilled to death and I hope that the movie lives up to what these guys are looking to see.

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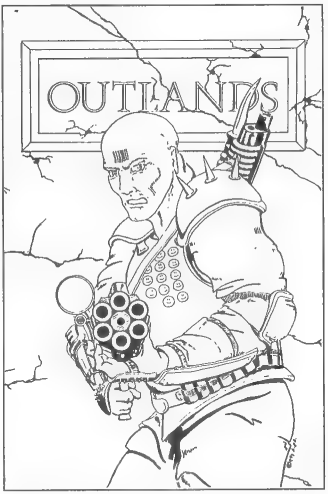

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"DC said this movie was going nowhere."

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The "definitive" Batman has been done more than a few times, since many valid "definitions" of Batman have appeared over the last half century — by Finger and Kane, by Dick Sprang, by Broome and Infantino, by Robbins and Novick, by O'Neil and Adams, by Moench and Colan, most recently by Frank Miller; and many others have produced memorable Batman sagas. The Batman by Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers stands very, very near the top of the heap, by everyone's estimation. This is hardly a surprise, as Steve's interpretations of the Avengers, Captain America, Dr. Strange, the Justice League, the Silver Surfer, and many others have been as "definitive" in their own ways — and darn good reads.

The Englehart/Rogers Batman proved to be definitive enough to inspire and directly involve Steve in the upcoming Batman movie. Here's the inside story as COMICS INTERVIEW takes you where the movie mags haven't! Dateline: Steve Englehart's telephone . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *Well, let's rehash some of the points you made in your letter, for the benefit of those folks who haven't read it in COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE. Why don't you tell us about your earliest involvement with the movie, taking it back to Michael Uslan.*

STEVE ENGLEHART: I didn't have much involvement with it at that time, other than to have been the guy who wrote the stories that made him want to go ahead and do it. I could talk to you about the stories, but if you want just the movie we should skip ahead.

LOU: *Let's go ahead on to the movie since that is our focus.*

STEVE: Okay. Well, let's see . . . I wrote those stories, he decided that he wanted to go ahead and make a movie about the Batman — and again I would point out, for the people that *did* read the BUYER'S GUIDE, that Silver St. Cloud *was* the love interest for the next ten years of scripts that came down. **Tom Mankie-**

STEVE ENGLEHART

"45 seconds into the movie someone

wicz, who wrote a couple of the James Bond movies — maybe many of the James Bonds, I'm not sure — did a couple of treatments that I thought were pretty good but they didn't really have the flavor of the Batman. **Tim Burton**, the guy who got tabbed to direct it, did a treatment which didn't do much for *me*, and I guess didn't do enough for his bosses. At that point the project had stretched — just in what I've just mentioned — the project had stretched from . . . I wrote the stories in '76, they might have come out in '77, Uslan started the project fairly shortly thereafter, no later than '78, and thus we get to 1986.

In '86 DC came to me, in the persons of **Andy Helfer** and **Jenette Kahn**, and said basically that this movie was going nowhere, that nobody could get the *feeling* for the Batman, that in fact the original scripts by **Mankiewicz** had not worked. That was long before I was involved so I'm not exactly sure, all I was told was that they didn't have the flavor. Then **Tim Burton** had done *his* thing, and I was never told exactly *why* that didn't work, though I have my own suspicions. But in any event, the project was stalled, and DC really wanted to go ahead. I'm frankly not sure if the impetus for this came from Warner Brothers, which now have the rights, or whether it was DC trying to *show* Warners that they could handle their end of it, or whatever. But I dealt with DC, Jenette and Andy, and basically I was hired for a year to do up to three treatments, if it came to that, and to be a kind of general consultant on the character. I did the first treatment, basically I sat down and wrote what I would like to see the movie be. I wasn't given very much guidance, I think at that time I had been told they wanted the origin of Robin, they wanted the origin of Batman, and they wanted the origin of the Joker.

YES, ONCE AGAIN THE MIRTHFUL MOUNTE-BANK IS BEHIND BARS...
CRIME IN REVERSE? WHY NOT? HA, HA! WHAT A JOKE THAT WOULD BE! BUT I'LL HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE FIRST...

A very early appearance of Bob's Joker . . .

LOU: *That's putting a lot into one little movie!*

STEVE: That's what *I* thought, yes — *and* a love interest! Well, **Mankiewicz's** original script had both the Joker and the Penguin, then they cut that back to just the Joker by the second thing, and that was still set. But I . . . let's see . . . I wrote the first one, then I went to New York and had some high level meetings with

JOKER! YOU LUNATIC — THERE'S NO PLACE YOU CAN GO FROM HERE!
I CAN GO OVER YOUR DEAD BODY, BATMAN!
LOVELY WEATHER FOR FISH, ISN'T IT? OR DID I SAY THAT?
I WANT YOU TO HEAR ALL MY BEST LINES BEFORE YOU DO YOUR DIVE INTO THE DAMP SPONGE!
HIS BADGE! THE ACID—

. . . and 30-plus years later, Steve Englehart teamed with penciller Marshall Rogers & inker Terry Austin for "Sign of The Joker". From DETECTIVE COMICS #476, 1978.

would blow Robin's head off."

Jenette and Andy — I'm not sure if Denny O'Neil was involved or not, I don't remember, and I don't mean to slight him if he was. I think he was just in the process of being hired onto the company at that point, and I'm not sure if he was involved or not.

So, they critiqued what I did and *that's* where I first learned some of the things that I had done that ran afoul of what the prevailing wisdom was. Basically, things that come to mind, I mean I wanted . . . I *didn't* want Robin in there. I have always thought — if you remember my stories — I did a Robin issue because I thought you *ought* to do a Robin issue, but essentially I did seven of those eight issues with no Robin. I like the creature of the night better than the father-figure motif —

LOU: *Well, let's face it, since 1968 Robin's pretty well been just a guest star in the Batman strips, except for a couple of stretches here and there — until Jason Todd came long.*

STEVE: Right. Well, I never had any use for Robin in terms of this movie. I had the same sensation you did, that that's a *lot* to put in there, and I thought we could simplify things a lot by getting rid of Robin. So what I proposed was that the movie would open up with Batman and Robin fighting some people in an alley, and 45 seconds into the movie someone would turn around and blow Robin's head off. *(Laughter.)* I did that for two reasons, 1) because I thought it was the right thing to do, as they say on the Quaker Oats commercials, and 2) I figured every critic would start his review by saying, "This is not the TV show, they killed Robin!" *(Laughter.)* I thought it was very important to sell the concept that this *wasn't* the TV show.

LOU: *And that's what they wish would have happened on the TV show!*

STEVE: Yeah! *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *So we blow Robin's head into Quaker Oats in the first minute, then you go into a flashback about how Bruce Wayne became the Batman?*

STEVE: Right, basically I was picking it up sort of midstream. When you analyze the character, he's a character who changed over time. His parents get killed on the street, he vows to be great when he grows up, and when he grows up he becomes the Batman. According to the legend — if you go back to the '40s — Batman preexisted Batman and Robin, he had already been doing it for awhile when he got Robin. So I thought, again, if you want the origin of Robin *and* the origin of Batman, you're covering a *lot* of

From DETECTIVE COMICS #475.

"A couple of treatments were pretty good but

The Batman by Bill "Peak" Sienkiewicz.

time, in addition to a lot of other stuff —

LOU: *Plus the Joker and Silver St. Cloud.*

STEVE: Exactly, exactly. So, you know, the thing with the parents getting killed on a street corner is an archetype, it *had* to be in there, but I thought that having done that I really didn't want to go through how he trained himself and how he got Alfred and how he got his mansion and so forth — so I thought killing Robin and all that, obviously he would have a *new* dedication to what he was doing, and you could flash from that back to his original dedication — kill a number of birds with one stone. *(Laughter.)* In any event, I was told this was not happening. Again, I dealt entirely through Jenette, I don't know who *she* was talking to, but according to Jenette the studio said Robin *had* to be in there.

LOU: *Do you suppose it could have been a merchandising reason or something like that?*

STEVE: Well, I'll get to that, but that hadn't come up at this point in time. Anyway, so there was that. Again, Jenette had been talking to the people in Hollywood, she had not been talking to me,

they didn't have the flavor of the Batman."

and I came into it having talked to almost nobody other than just the, "Here, go ahead and do this and try to make it feel right." I was operating very much on what I thought ought to be in there, so the first couple of meetings were kind of stormy. They were saying to me, "The perceived wisdom over the last five years is that this thing has to go this way." And I was saying, "But you hired *me* because *my* perceived wisdom is that it has to go that way." But that was to be expected. There was a point in the middle of it where I remember taking Andy aside and saying, "Why did they hire me if they don't want my expertise on it?" But in the end we came to something that I felt fit the Batman, and they felt fit the Batman as they saw it — it took several meetings.

I then went away, went back to California and did the second treatment, which everybody agreed hit the spot. It did what they needed so they didn't need a third treatment or whatever. *That* treatment was then sent up the line, it left Jenette's hands and went wherever it went, and about a month later it was announced that **Sam Hamm** was writing the script. That was the deal going in. You know, I never liked the movie business per se, the amount of sharkness involved, and the fact that I've gotten used to in comics — up until recently, which is another story — but generally if it has my name on it then it's what I wrote. I never liked the Hollywood idea of having to deal with so many people who were willing to cut your throat, and I didn't like the idea of having my name go up on a screen for something that I didn't write. But when they came to me and said they'd like me to do this, one of the first things I said was, "How about if I write the screenplay, too?" And I was told no. It was at least honest and above-board. They said they were going to hire somebody *fabulous* for this and even if I wrote a *great* treatment I couldn't write the screenplay. So the fact that **Sam Hamm** wrote the script was no skin off my nose. So **Sam Hamm** wrote the script, everybody said this was a great script, this finally got it right, and then they started to make the movie. Then I heard that **Sam Hamm's** script had been rewritten — according to NEWSWEEK it was co-rewritten. So that's the extent, I think, of my involvement.

The other thing I want to say, before it slips my mind, right after that DC was negotiating with **Marshall Rogers** and me to take over the BATMAN comic book again, and the first thing I said to them was, "I want to kill Robin." This is the comic-book end of it and I know these guys a lot better, and basically they said, "No, you can't kill Robin because we're stick-in-the-muds and we can't imagine doing anything this radical." As the negotiations kept going on I kept saying this was the way to go, "We need a darker version, it just doesn't *work* with this Jason Todd running around." And eventually they went up into the echelons of DC Comics again — in this case not Jenette, or at least not directly Jenette — because they came back to me and said the answer was still no, and that was the decision made by merchandising. "He's on too many lunch boxes and we can't kill him." A final footnote to that, you may or may not be aware — I'm told by

Pin-up illustration of The Joker by Infantino & Anderson (late 60's).

"I never had any use for Robin."

BUT--WHAT IF EVERYBODY STOPS EATING FISH--?
HADN'T THOUGHT OF THAT!
WHAT IF THEY ALL CONSPIRE AGAINST ME--
LEAVE MY JOKER-FISH--!! ALONE!
AND ANYWAY--
I'D LOSE MY CHEMICAL CONTRACTS!
JOKER MAKES ME OUTRAGEOUS!
HAHAHAHAHAHA

Another glimpse from "Sign of The Joker," by Englehart, Rogers and Austin.

somebody in a position to know — but having just killed Robin, they're busy recreating Robin even as we speak. The world will not be without a Robin for very long, and it's specifically for merchandising reasons.

LOU: *I'm not surprised. Well, what was it about the Mankiewicz script that didn't capture the atmosphere? Was it too James Bond-ish, to Chris Reeve-ish, too Adam West-ish, or what?*

STEVE: The word that I got before I read them was that the **Mankiewicz** stuff was too Bond-ish. I guess that's true. I was not seeing **Sean Connery** or **Timothy Dalton** or **Roger Moore** while reading it. One of the things that Jenette said to me was the people at the studio were divided into two camps, the people who wanted to do Superman in a gray suit, which is to say a kind of upbeat open thing, and the people who wanted to do *film noir*. **Mankiewicz's** stuff was not as bad as Superman in a gray suit, I thought it was pretty good, but it was basically lots of action in a dark city, all the right things, but it wasn't atmospheric. **Burton's** stuff . . . *(Laughter.)* I have never said this for publication — I would say that his stuff was full of concepts. There was a part in there where the Joker painted all of Gotham City with candy stripe colors. A director would go, "What a great visual!" But there wasn't much of a story to it, it was *total* Hollywood flash — very little Gotham city.

LOU: *Yeah, that sounds like a 1940s Batman gimmick or something.*

STEVE: Yeah.

LOU: *Well, about the movie scripts per se, was this your first script, was this the first time you ever scripted a movie?*

STEVE: It wasn't a script, it was a treatment, like a synopsis. But like my comic-book synopses, I quite often lapsed into actual dialogue and it got very detailed.

LOU: *Which you will do to try and give them an idea of the atmosphere and the way things are supposed to go.*

STEVE: That was the *specific* hook they were looking for. They could get everything except the right atmosphere, so I had a chance to really get into that. I must say that in my treatment, in order to collapse as many things as possible, I had the Joker kill Robin's parents — the Flying Graysons die in Gotham Square Garden or whatever, but it was by the Joker, and then the Batman took on Robin because he recognized a kindred spirit, and they go off after the Joker. It could go flying off in *way* too many directions if somebody else killed his parents and then you had to catch the Joker, too, and so on and so forth.

So, no, I had never done that before. I hadn't pursued that career. I had done stuff for Lucasfilms, for THE DROIDS, but that's not the same thing. So in that sense I was operating somewhat in the dark. I knew how to get the atmosphere across, and I knew what a movie ought to sound like, in my opinion, but I was not trained in the specific conventions of writing movie treatments. There was nothing about it that I think you or I would look at it and go, "What a stupid movie!" But it could well be that a professional screenwriter would look at this and go, "What a *stupid* movie!" But

"Basically I wasn't given very much guidance."

that was never brought up, nobody ever criticized my technique.

LOU: *Well, for the heck of it, how much did you get paid for the job?*

STEVE: Well, I got paid a lot more than I get paid for comics, and I'm told by friends in Hollywood a lot less than people usually get paid for treatments. I won't give you specifics. I was pleased because by my standard pay scale it was fine, but by Hollywood standards I got screwed.

LOU: *It was more than your average issue of DETECTIVE COMICS.*

STEVE: Yeah.

LOU: *Off on a tangent here, something I'm curious about, there was a rumble around the late '70s, early '80s, that DC was going to license out its characters for other persons to do, and you and Marshall were going to do the first one with Batman. What were the details of that, and how did it fall through?*

STEVE: It fell through because . . . basically the deal that they would cut us was that as long as we would print less than 10,000 copies, we could do anything that we wanted to do with the character. If we did any *more* than 10,000 copies then we would have to be under their editorial control. That didn't appeal, we weren't going to satisfy ourselves. Then and now 10,000 copies is a very low number to print. We weren't interested in doing a great story that nobody could see, and we weren't interested in doing a lousy story.

LOU: *Is there a chance you'll do another Batman story, or a series of stories? I'd like to see you tackle a Two-Face story, or Catwoman, since those are the only big villains you haven't touched yet.*

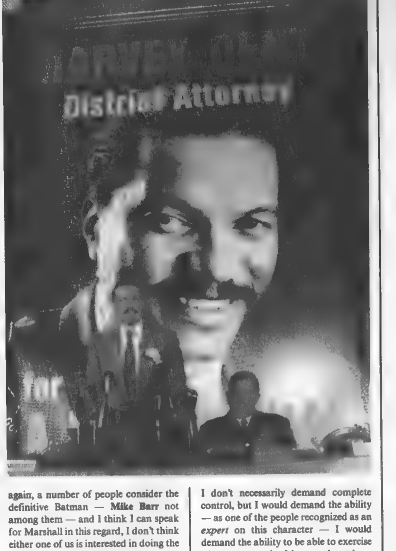
STEVE: I didn't do the Riddler either.

LOU: *Well, I consider him a lesser villain.*

STEVE: I suppose. Well, I'm not dead and DC's still in business, so I suppose there's a chance. You know, it's funny because the Batman is a character that I have *not* done more than I have done, I mean in terms of possible deals — the thing with Marshall and me in the late '70s fell through, the negotiations with Marshall and me in the mid '80s fell through. I really love the character. It's odd, another character that I really love is the Sub-Mariner, I've probably only done him about eight times in my whole life, too. I have a great affection for the dark and lurky stuff, and **Bill Everett's** Sub-Mariner ranks right up there with **Bob Kane** and **Bill Finger's** Batman in terms of that great feel of darkness.

But having done something which, again, a number of people consider the definitive Batman — **Mike Barr** not among them — and I think I can speak for Marshall in this regard, I don't think either one of us is interested in doing the character if we can't *really* do the character. The nice thing about the time we did it before was DC was so brain dead at that time that when I came over I was pretty much handed *carte blanche*. There was like nothing going on — Jenette had just come in, it was the end of the **Carmine Infantino** era, it was like, "*Nothing* is happening here, save these characters!" So we gave it our shot. Three years later they were saying, "Batman is too important to be just handed out so that you guys can continue to do whatever you want with him."

It was a similar attitude that killed the deal in the '80s. Without going into too many details, I was promised that I would have complete control of the character, and then I was told maybe not.



I don't necessarily demand complete control, but I would demand the ability — as one of the people recognized as an *expert* on this character — I would demand the ability to be able to exercise whatever expertise I have and not have to be hamstrung by a lot of bureaucracy. But the companies go through phases, and you're not the only one who asks when would I do it again.

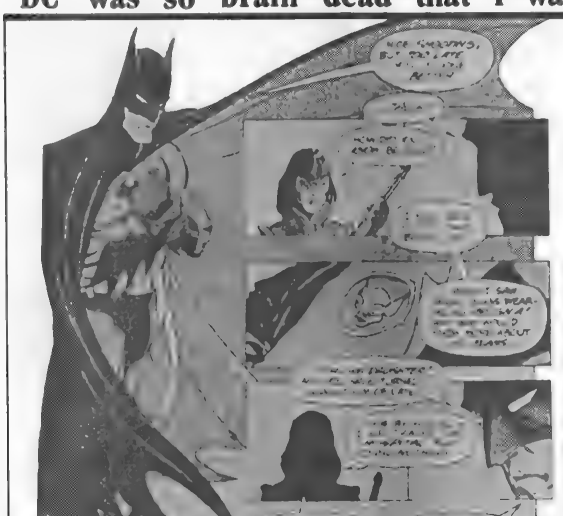
LOU: *They always will.*

STEVE: So things do change, at any point in time something might happen. But harking back at this point to the problems I had over my homosexual character in THE NEW GUARDIANS, I'm not a big fan of censorship, I'm not a big fan of bureaucratic interference, and I'd have to be shown that that was not going to be the case at this point for me to take on a project like that.

LOU: *Well, are you ready for a hard question?*

STEVE: Sure.

"DC was so brain dead that I was



Mike Barr's most talked about BATMAN story, "The Mounds" is from BATMAN ANNUAL #9 (1982). artwork is by Trevor von Eeden (Mr. Thriller).

LOU: *A bit of a problem here. In your letters you say that before you wrote your Batman stories the lunatic Joker that everybody accepts as the real Joker today hadn't been seen in 35 years.*

STEVE: Right.

LOU: *But your version of the Joker came out in '77, and the homicidal maniac Joker, to use your phrase, returned in '73 in a Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams story in BATMAN #251, and he easily had killed over a dozen people by the time your story came out. As a matter of fact your Joker, who kills off his own man as easily as he does his enemies, reminded me a lot of your Red Skull in CAPTAIN AMERICA circa '75. So . . . how was it that your Joker was the first homicidal maniac Joker we'd seen in 35 years, since he had been portrayed for about four years knocking off people left, right, up, down and diagonally?*

STEVE: Well, there's two parts to it, homicidal *and* maniac. You know, I just got the CBG this week that had that charge in it, from **Mike Barr** and some other guy, so I went back and looked at those stories to be sure that my memory was correct. If you actually go look at Denny's story, "The Joker's Five-Way Revenge," you will find that he *is* homicidal, but he's *not* a maniac. He *says* he is, but he always says he is. Denny took what had become the traditional Joker, the jokester Joker, and made him real.

I was talking about this with a friend today and he put it very nicely, Denny took the jokester Joker and tried to do him realistically, but what I did was a surrealistic Joker. Mine was insane, Denny's was not. Denny's Joker killed a lot of people, he laughed a lot, he did a thing where he killed one of his own men, but he did it with that kind of jokesterness on the square, shall we say. I mean instead of being a total buffoon he *pretended* to be a buffoon, but showed us that he was actually serious about it. My

pretty much handed carte blanche."

Joker was not particularly serious. I mean he would kill people, but he was a lunatic. The difference is between realism and surrealism. Denny's Joker didn't have conversations about fish. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Well, another hard question then. In your first letter you say that the only other woman in Bruce's life besides Silver St. Cloud is Vicky Vale. But there have been a lot of women in Batman's life besides Silver and Vicky, Julie Madison to begin with, Batwoman, Catwoman, Talia. Silver St. Cloud was in there, she was a very great character, but isn't it a bit presumptuous to say that Silver and Vicky are the only two women in Bruce's life?*

STEVE: I don't think so, obviously. Again, it's up to — as I said in one of those letters, you don't have to appreciate what I did but you have to admit that I did it. Part of what I meant by that was, you know, there may be people out there who — I'm sure there are — who honestly think that the **O'Neil/Adams** version was better than the **Englehart/Rogers** version, or that this particular character was more important than that particular character. But in my opinion Silver St. Cloud is the only woman who has ever really stood out in Bruce's life. Julie Madison came and went quickly, she was just a device. Vicky Vale, as far as I can ever tell, was just a device. Even when **Doug Moench** was doing her and tried to give her depth, she was there to play off of Nocturna or the Catwoman or whatever, she was just a device. The Catwoman, again, seems like a device — every one of them seems like a device.

They're there in order to give Batman some sort of female romantic thing to play off, but there was never any romance. Finally, to get to Talia — what can I tell you, I think Ras Al Ghul is one of the great Batman villains, but Talia never struck me as particularly memorable. She was there to kind of be the daughter of Fu Manchu, in effect, but Fu Manchu was the one who was important. I know I'm forgetting somebody in here, that you mentioned. **Mike Barr** I thought probably took offense about Talia because he just wrote that thing, but I don't — it's my opinion — but I don't believe people consider Talia the great romantic interest of Bruce's life, of Batman's life. There is somebody I'm forgetting —

LOU: *Batwoman.*

STEVE: Batwoman! I can't take the stuff that happened in the '50s and early '60s as being, you know, crucial to the Batman

Cover & story panels from Denny O'Neil & Neal Adams' 1973 issue (251) of BATMAN

STEVE ENGLEHART

"Even though she's called Vicky Vale,

as a character — all those giant alien dimensions. *(Laughter.)* But with Silver I set out to give Bruce Wayne a fully developed adult woman with whom he could have a fully developed adult relationship — they even *slept* together, can you believe it! I think she is the only real woman in Bruce's entire chronology. You know, Clark Kent and Lois Lane, as much of a device as Lois is, they at least have 40 years of history. None of the women in Batman's life have *that* kind of history. To me Vicky Vale is the generic Lois Lane — "We need to have somebody to play off the Batman, we'll invent Vicky Vale." The rest of them did less.

And the other thing is that Silver St. Cloud *was* the romantic interest for the first ten years of BATMAN movie attempts. Vicky Vale, Talia, the rest of them, did not make the cut when the movie was originally being made. Now that it is ten years since we've seen Silver St. Cloud it doesn't amaze me that they would go back to the more generic person. But again, as I said in one of my letters, if you look at the **Sam Hamm** script, the female lead in there *is* Silver St. Cloud. She's called Vicky Vale and she is a newspaperperson, but she's got the same character as Silver, she goes through a number of the same situations as Silver. So even though she's called Vicky Vale, that is Silver St. Cloud in that story. And also THE GREATEST BATMAN STORIES EVER TOLD that just came out says many people think she's one of the best. I'm sure there are people that think that Vicky Vale or Talia or whoever is *really* the woman in the Batman's life, but I don't think most people do.

LOU: *Well, what do you think of Michael Keaton as the Batman?*

STEVE: I don't buy it. *(Laughter.)* I parrot the line everybody else does, which is that **Michael Keaton** is a pretty good actor, but I don't think he's Bruce Wayne. The guy I was touting right from the start all along — I have no idea if this deal was doable — but the guy I like is the guy who plays Dex Dexter on DYNASTY, Alexis's husband if that rings any bells. He's dark, tall, handsome, etc., and he *looks* like Bruce Wayne to me. You know, I read the NEWSWEEK article, all I know is what I read in the news weeklies, and that picture did not convince me.

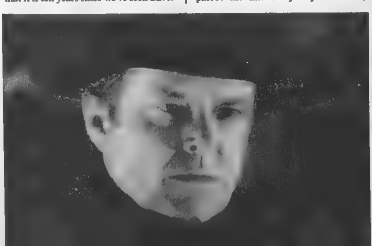
And the stuff about — I'm sure if you've paid any attention to my comments on Batman over the years, but I think that he's sane — and the one thing that I *did* have a problem with on the **Sam Hamm** script, and apparently has been *emphasized* under **Tim Burton**, is that this is a neurotic guy who doesn't know exactly what he's doing here. That has nothing to do with **Michael Keaton**, whoever was playing it would have to play that. But I could sort of see **Michael Keaton** being able to play a not quite on top of it Batman — a guy who's not *quite* big enough or dedicated enough and etc. etc. etc. And as long as we're dishing the dirt, I'm not crazy about **Jack Nicholson** as the Joker.

LOU: *Neither am I, really.*

STEVE: I think he'll play crazy, but a specific thing about **Nicholson** is I remember in THE SHINING how he started off crazy and by the time he got two-thirds into the movie even *he* couldn't get any crazier, even though he was supposed to. There's only so much crazy you can do over the course of a movie, even when you're playing the Joker. And secondly, rumors that I heard during the course of the last year, when negotiations apparently weren't going well with **Nicholson**, one of the names that was first bruited about was **Peter O'Toole**, who I think would be fabulous. He *looks* the part, and he *can* play arch-weirdoes as well as anybody. Also I heard **Tim Curry**, and I thought **Tim Curry** would make a great Joker!

LOU: *Yes.*

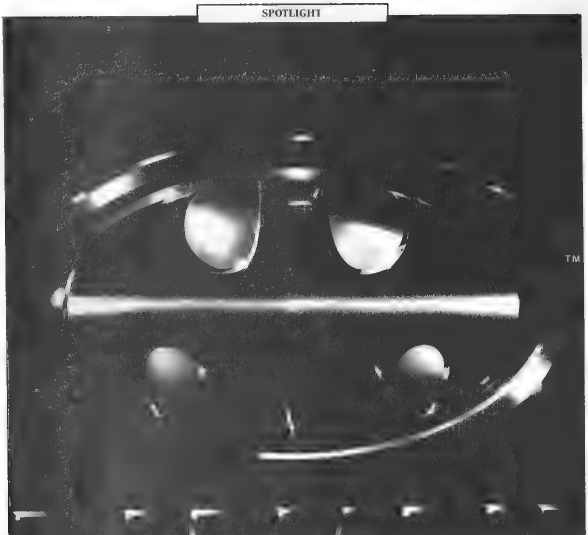
STEVE: Going back to the difference between a realistic Joker and a surrealistic Joker, I think **Jack Nicholson** being crazy is so well known that we're not going to be surprised by the Joker, we're not going to get that flash of, "This guy is *really* over the edge!" Whereas **Peter O'Toole** or **Tim Curry** coming into it without that background could make you see the Joker and not just see **Jack Nicholson**. But that's just my opinion.



that is Silver St. Cloud in (the movie)."

Kim Basinger as Vicki St. Cloud in the movie

On the Batmobile: "It looks like a Bonneville Flats race car."



Marty spent about an hour or so in interesting conversation with Dean and Mark, but the topic was not Batman so we're saving that for an upcoming issue. (Actually, the rest of the interview was abducted by mysterious forces and we're getting up a covert rescue operation, but only time will tell whether THE PRISONER will escape!)

MARTY HERZOG: *I understand that both of you were on the BATMAN set. Is that true?*

MARK ASKWITH: No, Marty, it's a lie, I don't know where you got that idea. *(Laughter.)* Yes, when Dean and I were in England for the UKCAC — United Kingdom Comic Art Convention — in the third week of September, DC organized a trip and a bunch of artists and writers got to visit Pinewood.

DEAN MOTTER: The big 007 studio. They were about three-quarters finished constructing most of the Gotham City sets, exteriors, and two of the interiors were virtually complete. Let's see, there was the Fluggleheim Art Gallery, and the gangland boss penthouse suite. But the most *inspiring* was going down the Main Street of Gotham City, which was about six blocks long it seems like, and the first three stories. It was incredible, it was like walking through Radiant City!

All artwork accompanying this interview is © DC Comics, Inc. unless otherwise noted

"How could they go wrong with that city, those

Above: Batman waits in the shadows. Next page: Bruce Wayne studies The Joker.

MARTY: *Dean gets in his reference to MISTER X.*

DEAN: Yeah, it was *just* like it. The funny part was the first part of the tour went into . . . they showed us the boardroom before the tour, and they showed us a number of sketches of the city and the costumes and the car, and there were some models and things like that. When we saw the production designer, he walked in wearing this overcoat and dark glasses, looking slightly emaciated — this architect of Gotham City that looked a lot like Radiant City. *(Laughter.)* Everyone sort of looked in my direction, just sort of shrugging innocently because they had nothing to do with this man's . . .

MARTY: *This man's character.*

DEAN: Yeah — he looked *suspiciously* like Mister X. It was funny. What else did we see? Oh, the Batmobile —

MARK: Well, this is *quite* funny — as you walk through Gotham City there is what looked to be an ordinary garage, and we went in and there were two different Batmobiles, *goers* as they were called.

MARTY: *Goers?*

MARK: As in they go. *(Laughter.)* These were two of the cars they actually would be able to drive around, and they have a wonderful turbine in the back — beautiful, it looks like a Bonneville Flats race car. Both the city and the car were clearly someone's vision of the future, if you had to design the city of the future in 1950.

DEAN: Or earlier.

MARK: 1930 maybe. Gotham City is sort of rusted art deco and everything is too *close* — there were no zoning restrictions in Gotham City. *(Laughter.)* Beautifully done.

MARTY: *Did you get the impression that they were trying for some sort of time period or —*

MARK: No, they were going for the *mood* of Gotham City.

DEAN: Yeah.

MARK: The mood of Gotham City is very . . . it's *not* New York. It's a sort of psychotic view of what New York might look like.

DEAN: Their vision of Gotham City was along the lines of Radiant City. Had New York emerged from the urban landscape without any controls, form the '30s, this is what it might be like today.

MARTY: *If you were to give your impressions of the movie from the very little bit you saw, and I'm talking about a critique of the work that went into the movie, do you feel that it's going to be camp or serious or what? What are they going for?*

DEAN: Well, it was funny because

Batmobiles, with the costume designs that we saw?"

everyone came away from that tour, I think, feeling like, "My God, they could actually do it right!" This looks like they're going to do it right. It looked like a lot of serious and imaginative thought was going into the way it looked. The only question mark in everybody's mind was the obvious one about **Michael Keaton**, but everything else seemed like they'd nailed it, they'd hit it on the head. How could they go wrong with that city, those Batmobiles, with the costume designs that we saw, with the models we saw? And, having read the screenplay, they have the right story, it all fits together — with this one seed of doubt which they kept trying to dispel by saying, "No-no, believe me, he's gonna be great!"

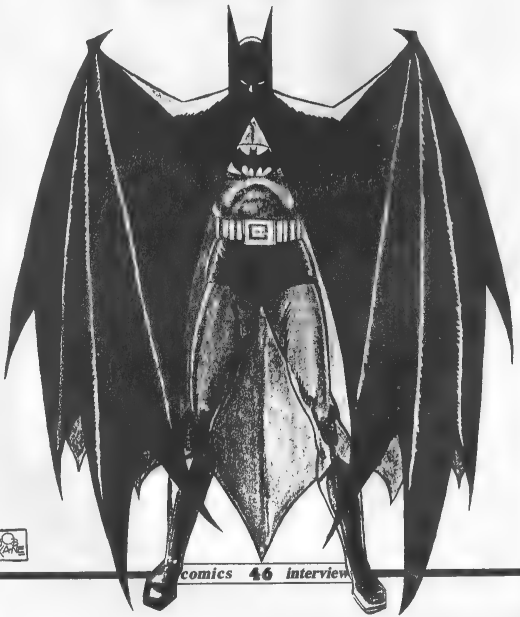
MARK: Well, even the way they've redesigned the Batmobile, the way they've redesigned the costume of Batman, it is *clear* that they are taking the movie from the pages of a grim DARK KNIGHT. There are a lot of subtle, oblique references to DARK KNIGHT. The script, by the way, I thought was terrific and really moved along.

DEAN: Yes!

MARK: I think **Sam Hamm** did a terrific job in capturing, *really*, the essence of an archetypal Batman. But, as Dean has pointed out, as *many* people on the tour pointed out, what you see may not be what you get. The way the characters *act* in this environment is something else, they could camp it up if they wanted to — but unless they allow for a lot of ad-libbing or they do a major rewrite on the script, they're not going to do that.

"I never talk about Batman."

BOB KANE



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"Actually, I'm Bruce Wayne."

One day, as the story goes, a young cartoonist was asked by his editor, one Vincent Sullivan, to come up with a costumed character. Superman had been a tremendous success, the reasoning went, so there was every reason to expect that another costumed character would hit it big. So the young cartoonist went home and fooled around with the Superman concept a bit, but wasn't satisfied. Drawing on his art background, in one of those inspirational moments creators live for, he recalled a Leonardo da Vinci sketch of a flying machine — with bat *wings. Then, being a storyteller, he drew from THE MARK OF ZORRO, a film starring Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., for his heroic figure, and then on THE BAT WHISPERS, a film based on THE BAT, by Mary Roberts Rinehart, and his character became a mysterious detective. (By the way, you may be able to find THE BAT, starring Vincent Price and Agnes Moorehead, a 1959 remake of THE BAT WHISPERS, in a nearby video store.) That character, of course, was the Batman, who first appeared in DETECTIVE COMICS #27 and has been continuously published in new stories ever since, who was made into two movie serials during the '40s, who was the basis for an incredibly successful '60s TV series, who has starred in innumerable cartoons, and who is now celebrating his Golden Anniversary with a major motion picture that was ten years in the making! And that one-time young cartoonist, of course, was none other than Bob Kane . . .*

JEFF GELB: *Bob, I understand that you wrote a bible for the film.*

BOB KANE: Yes, I did.

JEFF: *Did you come up with the storyline?*

BOB: No, **Sam Hamm** came up with the story.

JEFF: *How do you feel about the finished screenplay?*

BOB: Well, it had five drafts, and the later drafts really didn't go too far away from the original. I was extremely pleased with the first script, because it was the way *I* would have written it if they had let me write the screenplay. I was not disappointed. In the beginning I had a lot of reservations, hoping it would be the way I would write it. I'm a pretty good writer but I'm not a screenwriter per se — they put you in these little categories, screenwriter and creator and so forth. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Did you want to take a stab at writing the screenplay?*

BOB: Yes. I wrote a treatment along with the bible. It was a very good treatment, they liked it, but they went with **Sam Hamm**. **Sam Hamm** is an *excellent* writer but somehow he hasn't had that much experience, I think he did one movie, CRY something —

JEFF: *NEVER CRY WOLF.*

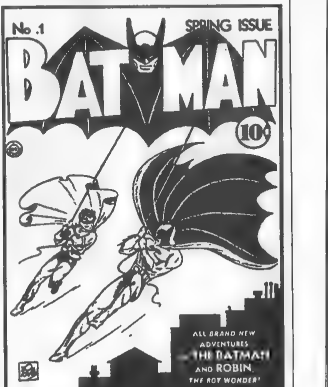
BOB: Right. He hasn't had a lot of experience, but he has a style that is *extremely* dramatic — he sets up his scenes dramatically, and his words are very good, and he has a great eye for composition. He and **Tim Burton** worked on it together. I *critiqued* the script when it was through, along with some of the people at Warners — they asked my input, and they did take quite a few of my suggestions for improvement in the later drafts. I've been involved with the movie for quite a few years as a consultant.

JEFF: *What became of Robin? I understand he was originally there, and then he wasn't there.*

BOB: Robin only came in as Dick Grayson, not as Robin, for the last five minutes. That's the problem with the film, if you could call it a problem, because I think a lot of people will go to the movie expecting to see Robin also. And I think the reason they killed him off in the comic book was perhaps to prepare the audience that there would be no Robin in the BATMAN movie. Although, you know, fiction is like illusion, and if they want to bring Robin back they can. Robin is actually still living, he's a Titan fighting with the teenage group. It's only Jason Todd that's been finished off, and he wasn't really Robin, he was just the *new* Robin.

JEFF: *Since you brought that up — I don't think anybody's done an interview with you for a comics fanzine since that event — how did you feel about that? Were you involved in that in any way?*

BOB: They didn't even talk to me about it. I was very disappointed that they would do that. It's not necessarily that they didn't ask my opinion, because I haven't been involved with the comic books for many years, but I think it was a *bad* move to kill Robin off. First of all they were a team — it would be like killing Dr. Watson off and leaving Sherlock Holmes by himself, or Tonto and the Lone Ranger, Tarzan and Jane. It's the wrong move. And, of course, it *kills* the merchandising on Robin, which was very big along with Batman.



Bob Kane's cover for BATMAN #1, 1940. Issue retells the origin of the Dynamic Duo.

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"For 70 fans they kill Robin off? That's absurd!"

But aside from that, why fool around with an original concept? They could have had him go away for awhile, or he could have been wounded, could have been hurt, and they could have written him *out* but still could bring him back if they wanted to bring him back. Why kill him! And it was such a *poor* way of doing it! I think it's all a subterfuge; I think the whole thing was done for the movie, so that people wouldn't expect Robin to be in the movie.

But then the dichotomy is that in a sequel — and surely they will follow with a sequel shortly — I feel this will be a blockbuster movie, this movie will *not* fail . . . listen to me digress. *(Laughter.)* This movie will be, I feel, one of the all time blockbusters. The anticipation is so *great* now that if you *hate* Batman you're going to be curious and go see it. So, it's the first time around. I feel the first time around is never equalled by any sequel, and I don't think any sequel has ever done the business of the first one. I'm not sure, but I don't think so.

JEFF: *I think you're basically right, and I'm glad to hear you're as strongly assured of success as you are. Have some of the cast members signed for more than one film, do they have plans for a sequel?*

BOB: There are going to be at *least* three films. In fact they may start the first sequel very shortly. If the film's a hit — this isn't for certain — but the plan is before the year is out they'll start the second one. They have the sets built, so the second one could very well be coming out in '91, no later than '92.

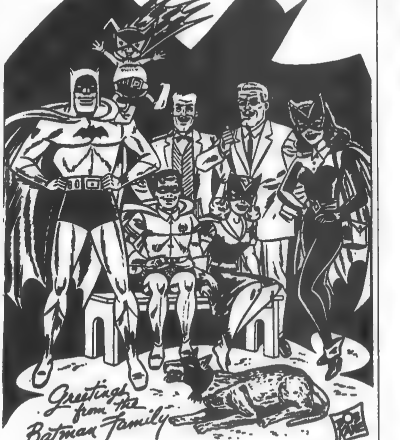
JEFF: *Now, about the "Robin subterfuge" you mentioned —*

BOB: Oh, yes — the subterfuge is that, what, out of 10,000 phone calls voting on whether Robin should live or die there was a difference of only 70 calls — so for 70 fans they kill Robin off? That's absurd! It sounds like a subterfuge. Come on, you're going to kill Robin because 70 kids didn't like him? I mean come on, this is editorial policy! If somebody had come to me and said that 1,000 people hated Batman, I would have said, "So what!" I would have continued to do Batman if a million people hated him, what's that got to do with my point of view!

JEFF: *Well, that makes sense, and I can understand your being perturbed about it.*

BOB: I'm confused, I don't know why they did that. They should not have done that. Stupid move.

JEFF: *Getting back to the movie, we're talking about a project that took almost a decade to get off the ground.*



Kane's 1963 (back) cover from BATMAN ANNUAL #5.

BOB: Yes, it did.

JEFF: *But you never gave up hope on it.*

BOB: Absolutely not. Warner Brothers was very high on it, and **Guber-Peters** particularly were always very high on it, and they kept putting money into it every three years to make sure it would go on. **Bob Canton,** the president of Warner Brothers, *loved* the project all the way down the line, and he intended to do it.

JEFF: *Was anyone nervous that the TV show might have left the wrong impression of what the film would create for an audience?*

BOB: Well, there are a lot of dichotomies going on, Jeff. It's been the talk of the industry; it's hard to know what the left hand and the right hand were doing, because there are so many generations that Batman has encompassed. Batman has gone through many phases, every ten years it changes, you see. Right now there are two factions. There are the baby boomers who know the TV show; they *don't* know the dramatic comic book prior to that, so they think the movie is probably going to be a comedy. Then there are the readers who *know* the roots from which he came, that he is a vigilante, mysterious, a loner.

We've already had the campy TV show, so now we're going to have a serious movie. It's not a campy movie, not a comedy. It's a heavy melodrama, mysterious, with, if you want to call it that, black comedy — with **Nicholson's** performance as only he can do. That's not punning comedy like **Adam West.** So black comedy, perhaps, but it is *not* a comedy. **Tim Burton** is not doing a comedy. **Michael Keaton** is not the comedic actor he was in MR. MOM and BEETLEJUICE. In CLEAN AND SOBER he proved himself with the accolades from the critics as being a *fine* dramatic actor, which he *is* in this film, from the rushes I have seen.

JEFF: *So, the fans do not have to worry that this movie is not going to be able to*

"Michael Keaton still doesn't look like Bruce Wayne."

be taken seriously, at least on some levels.

BOB: Absolutely. I've *viewed* it, I've been in London, I've read the scripts, I've seen the actors, I *know* what **Tim Burton** is trying to do — it's going to be an avant-garde film, film noir! It's going to have a CITIZEN KANE effect. Like **Orson Welles** turned the industry at that time on its neck, this is what Tim will do in this one. He has a different vision, this will not have the look of any other film you've ever seen — from what I've seen of it. He's a very imaginative young director, and the film just has a different look.

The sets in England have a different look, they have like a **Fritz Lang** METROPOLIS look, DR. CALIGARI — a very modern and grotesque look, almost, and it also has sort of a '40s look. You can't pinpoint it. Gotham City is like a place that . . . it's decadent, like nothing that ever existed before. So, this film will last for a long time and be viewed as a work of art, I feel. I haven't seen the complete film, I've only seen little bits and pieces, but I *know* from what I've seen that it's going to be different. If you've seen the trailer, the minute-and-a-half gives you an illusion of what it's all about. Did you see the trailer?

JEFF: *I sure did, and it left me feeling like I hoped it would be as good as it seemed, but I really couldn't tell. The cuts were so quick, you know. Just when I was getting used to something, it was something else.*

BOB: *(Laughs.)* Well, it's a *teaser!* It's like your girl fooling around with you and then she leaves and you don't see her for another few weeks. *(Laughter.)* You want more!

JEFF: *They definitely did what they were supposed to do.*

BOB: They're going to have a three-minute trailer giving you more, that should be out soon. But actually they can't give you too much, because they want you to see the film.

JEFF: *Yeah, exactly. Were you involved at all, Bob, in the storyboards for the film, as an artist?*

BOB: No, I didn't draw the storyboards. **Tim Burton** — he's an animator, you know, or he was — he laid out storyboards with English storyboard artists in London. I did many sketches that I gave to Tim before he went to London, of the new Batman costume. It had to be mechanically rigged. And I did the Batmobile, which they didn't use exactly. What they did was they adapted from my sketches. And I did batarangs and some things. I did make many sketches but it wasn't storyboarding, they were pictorial essays of what I thought the character and so on should look like, the costume and so forth.

JEFF: *Is Tim a comics fan? Did he grow up reading BATMAN?*

BOB: Oh, he loves BATMAN. And he was an animator, worked in animation before he did PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE.

JEFF: *What was your initial reaction when it turned out that Michael Keaton was going to be Batman?*

BOB: Oh, the obvious. *(Laughs.)* It was disconcerting, only because after all I created Batman in another image. The image, obviously, was **Cary Grant,** 32 years old with a great build and a strong, handsome, chiselled face, and jet black hair, or a young **Robert Wagner,** suave, elegant, debonair. These were my prototypes and I told this to casting, I told this to Tim. Square jaws, no weak jaws, these were my initial thoughts, and they *knew* that at Warners. They asked me five years ago, I told them to go for a young

Tim Burton

"Jack Nicholson is the epitome of the Joker, he is stunning."

Cary Grant, a young **Robert Wagner,** and they came up with a guy who's 5'10", kind of slight in a way, and the hair is kind of funny.

I was confused, and then Tim and I discussed this. What Tim was looking for was a three-dimensional human being, not a cardboard cutout from the comic book, and not the TV show. He was looking for a Mr. *Ordinary,* and my concept, of course, was Mr. *Extra*-Ordinary. In other words, how does an ordinary guy react when his parents are killed, and then when he puts on this *awesome* costume he becomes the idealized image of the ordinary person he is — if you can understand what I'm saying.

JEFF: *Right.*

BOB: In other words, if you're already idealized to begin with, then why put on a costume? Where's the connection? As Tim says, if he's 6'2" and strong and husky, he can just go out in a ski mask and beat the hell out of criminals. But just think, if you take an *ordinary* guy as Bruce Wayne, like anybody in the movie theater, and all of a sudden he becomes this superhero as Batman, then there's a *reason* for putting on this awesome costume. And also Bruce Wayne suffers, he broods, he has migraines; he's three-dimensional, not one-dimensional like the campy TV show. What Tim wants to show is one end of the spectrum to the other — here's an ordinary nice guy and all of a sudden he becomes this awesome idealized image of what he was before. That made sense, the more he talked to me about it.

Then I saw CLEAN AND SOBER. Of course **Michael Keaton** still doesn't *look* like Bruce Wayne, with that funny hair and all, so what I did was I took stills from CLEAN AND SOBER and with white paint I gave him a haircut, and then I put a little hairpiece in the front with black ink — and I said, "Tim, he could be Bruce Wayne, but get rid of that haircut and add a hairpiece in the front." *(Laughter.)* Now, **Michael Keaton** has an edge — he's like **Jack Nicholson** to a degree, they have the same kind of eyebrows. And in the movie something about the face of evil . . . it could be either one. In other words, Batman *makes* the Joker into what he becomes, this maniacal killer. They wanted to cast

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"The new Batman costume had to be mechanically rigged."

Alan Moore & Brian Bolland . . . pay a tribute to Bob (from THE KILLING JOKE).

those roles so they could look *like* each other's image. It's kind of hard to explain.

JEFF: *I think I understand, like they're mirror images of each other.*

BOB: Exactly. So, **Michael Keaton** has this craziness also about him, he has an edge as Bruce Wayne, and so it works. It's funny, when you see him on the set, he *sits* there looking like Mr. Ordinary Guy, reading the sports section of the paper. Then they say, "Michael, get ready," and he puts on this costume and *looks* like Batman! Of course the costume alone without *anyone* in it is awesome looking, because it's like a suit of armor!

JEFF: *Did you try it on, Bob?*

BOB: No, I didn't. I tried the cowl on, though, and figured I looked like Batman. It's a terrific costume, it's much more awesome than **Adam West.** They have many capes! When he jumps through a skylight it flows out like bat wings! I suggested that to **Tim Burton.** Originally I said that would have to be rigged, and he said, "Rigged?" And I said, "Yeah. The cape can't lay there like a *lump,* like a towel like **Adam West** had, it's got to look like bat wings!" They followed a lot of my suggestions.

JEFF: *That I have seen in the trailer, and it looks great.*

BOB: Yeah. It's a *tremendous* costume. And **Michael Keaton** — between you and me and all the fans in the world — if this movie came on the screen tomorrow and no one had *heard* who was going to play Batman, and you just see Batman on the screen, would you *know* that was **Michael Keaton** in that costume?

JEFF: *No, you're right.*

BOB: No one in the world would recognize him. *Nobody* would know **Michael Keaton** was Batman. He looks *awesome,* he looks *powerful,* he's Batman! And he has a swagger about him — he's an actor who knows how to *act* like Batman, not some big hunk who is dull. This guy swaggers around the set, and he's agile, and he's very athletic. He really bounces around, I'll tell you. He does a lot of his own stunts — although they do have stunt men for some of the stuff. So, he's terrific as Batman.

JEFF: *What did you think of the BATMAN TV show, by the way?*

BOB: Oh, I *loved* the show! You see, I love it on two levels — I love the mysteriouso, but I also love the camp of the show. I thought BATMAN was the most *unique* TV show ever put on, because it was actually a transition from the strip to the screen, with the POWs and the SOCKs. Adam was great, and all of the guest stars, the cameos, it was all great! It still holds up today as a classic. It's a *classic* show! It's not the movie, it's apples and oranges, it's like playing *Beethoven* or rock. It's great for what it is, and the movie will be great for what *it* is. Batman is great in any form, it all depends on what you like. Now, the dyed-in-the-wool fans don't like the show, and probably the people who like the show may not like the film — but they all agree on one thing, they like the Batman. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Was there ever any discussion about having Adam West in the film in any capacity?*

BOB: Well, a cameo perhaps, maybe in the opening scene. He's too old now for Batman. I love Adam, and he looks good for his age. The scene at the beginning is a recall of the origin, with a couple with a kid coming out of a theater and then they get waylaid by some punks, and the husband doesn't get shot and killed, but he gets socked over the head. My wife had the leading shot in it before the title — she's a marvelous actress, **Elizabeth Sanders** — but British Equity is very tough, like American Equity is very tough over here. When **Andrew Lloyd Webb** wanted to get his wife into THE PHANTOM, they wouldn't let her anywhere near THE PHANTOM for six months, until he finally said he'd pull the plug on the whole show if they didn't let her in. So, that's our little heartbreak, that she couldn't be in it.

JEFF: *That is a shame. So, was Adam West perhaps going to be the father figure?*

BOB: We thought about that, and I think they offered it to him, but I don't know.

JEFF: *Are you in the film?*

BOB: I was supposed to be in the film, in a newsroom as Bob the cartoonist, drawing a bat and a suit. When I first read the scene it said Jerry the cartoonist, and I told Tim they'd spelled Jerry wrong, "It's not J-E-R-R-Y, it's B-O-B." *(Laughter.)* So I was in it; I went to London in November, but they had to put my scene back to the middle of January. I had an engagement in New York so we flew back across — we missed that flight that

"Bill Finger was my chief writer — one of the unsung

crashed by one week, we left on that same plane a week earlier. So I was a little apprehensive, obviously.

JEFF: *Yeah, I'd say.*

BOB: So, I wouldn't fly back in the winter just to do my scene. So there were two disappointments, I didn't have my scene, and my wife didn't have her scene because they wouldn't give her the green card. Everyone fought for her, Tim and Warner Brothers and myself, but they're very tough over there.

JEFF: *That is a shame. On the other hand, this must be the fulfillment of a life's dream, to have this film being made. What's the feeling of that?*

BOB: *(Pause.)* Not as ecstatic as you might think. *(Laughs.)*

JEFF: *Really? Why is that?*

BOB: It's hard to explain. I'm a very complicated person. I think sometimes if you wait too long for something, it's a letdown. As my wife says, "Bob, you ought to be counting your blessings, better late than never." And of course she's right, but I wanted it ten years ago, I wanted it five years ago. I have it now, that's great and I love it, but I would have been *happier* ten years ago. *(Laughter.)* And I did have a big resurgence in '66, Batmania hit the country as it's hitting again today, so this is my second time around — and 23 years ago I was 23 years younger. *(Laughter.)* So, I *love* it, but it can't compensate for lost youth. I created Batman at 18 and I was famous at 20, and there were movie serials in '43 and '49, and then we had BATMAN in '66 — it's kind of been a lifelong courtship with Lady Luck, and I enjoyed each era as I am enjoying it now.

JEFF: *We should talk about Nicholson. Did you watch him do any of his performance?*

BOB: Yes, I did watch him do one scene, and he is absolutely fantastic! *Jack Nicholson* is the *epitome* of the Joker, he is absolutely stunning! He's got that maniacal quality that only Jack has, even without the costume and the makeup! *(Laughter.)* I met Jack, I gave him a Joker lithograph as a token of good luck, back here in L.A. before we went to England. I went up to his house and we spoke for two or three hours. He asked, you know, how I thought *I* would play the Joker. I explained the obvious, of course, that he's not **Cesar Romero.** He's not a buffoon, a clown, a jester, he's a maniacal *killer,* a psychotic — as Jack played in THE SHINING.

I explained where I got the original idea, from THE MAN WHO LAUGHS by **Victor Hugo.** That was a silent movie when I was a kid, I guess I was around eleven or twelve when I saw it, with **Conrad Veidt,** the German actor. It was some kind of story about a rival Gypsy gang, and there was a surgeon who would *cut* the mouths of the children into a ghastly grin — for some reason, I don't remember the whole story — and they grew up with the funereal eyes and that mouth cut in that ghastly grin. So, when I was starting out in 1939, **Bill Finger** was my chief writer — one of the unsung heroes of the Batman, he died in '74, and he never got the credit due him — but he was an *integral* part of the whole Batman mystique, as most of the editors and fans know today. I give Bill a lot of credit, he was the unsung hero. In *those* days somehow the credit only went to the creator, we didn't put on the writer's name, or the inker or the letterer or Uncle Joe or Aunt Tilly like today. *(Laughter.)* We only had the one name for the creator of the strip, or creators — Siegel and Shuster created Superman, so it was two names. Well, Bill came in after the fact, he didn't create the Batman, but he did help with many of the villains, he co-created some of the villains, and he deserved more credit than he got during his lifetime. In retrospect I feel badly about that.

JEFF: *Well, it's that kind of industry, or at least it was.*

BOB: It was at that time; it has now changed quite a bit.

JEFF: *Let's get back to the Joker.*

BOB: Well . . . again, with the old chestnut, **Jerry Robinson** said *he* created the Joker, I guess you've heard *that* story. Well, Jerry was an assistant when I started, he was doing backgrounds and lettering. But I remember Bill and I discussed having a practical joker, and then Bill brought me a photograph of **Conrad Veidt** from THE MAN WHO LAUGHS and said, "Here is a picture of the Joker" — and then he brought me the book, which I read, THE MAN WHO LAUGHS, by **Victor Hugo.** Now, **Jerry Robinson** came up with a playing card of a court jester, like on a deck of cards, and he said, "Why don't you have the Joker leave his card when he kills somebody

From the 1943 Columbia serial . . . the first dynamic duo: Lewis Wilson (Batman) and Douglas Croft (as Robin).

© 1943 Columbia Pictures/DC Comics, Inc.

heroes of the Batman, he never got the credit due him."

with the ghastly grin!" — he used a spray gun with different capsules that would turn the victims' faces into the ghastly grin of the Joker when they died.

So, at any rate, we used the card once or twice — so my retort to **Jerry Robinson**, as to why I refute his claim that he created the Joker, is because Bill really did, with me. Bill brought me the photo of **Conrad Veidt**, I have it in my file, and when I have my autobiography it will be in the book. In fact if I were to create the Joker in **Jerry Robinson's** image, he would look like the joker playing card, he would not look like **Conrad Veidt**. There are other reasons for refuting Jerry's claim, but this is the one that's implicit. If he came to me with the card and I never saw the other, and it was his idea, I would have drawn him as a playing card — and I never did. I could prove my point in court.

JEFF: *Are you writing your autobiography now?*

BOB: I'm working on one. Well, it's all written, and it's pictorial, has all of my memorabilia, and it's been to a few publishers now, and any minute I should hear from one. I hope to get it out by October.

JEFF: *This is the year, this is definitely the year.*

BOB: Yes, it's got to be this year.

JEFF: *Bob, do you know how some creators grow to hate their creations after awhile for one reason or another? Have you ever had that problem, or have you always appreciated the fact that you're the guy who created Batman?*

BOB: Actually, I'm Bruce Wayne. I have photos of me when I was 40, 45, 50, and I looked just like him — tall, dark and handsome, chiselled features, *I* could have played him but I'm not an actor. My face was the image I drew him in. I never wanted to be an actor, but behind the scenes I was actor, producer, director, writer and artist. I was the camera eye. That's why I am a good writer, I think visually. And Tim is a good director because he thinks visually.

JEFF: *But what I mean is, you know, like after awhile Arthur Conan Doyle hated Sherlock Holmes and wanted to kill him. Have you ever had similar thoughts about Batman?*

BOB: I never talk about Batman, except now with all of the interviews. *(Laughter.)* I never dream about him, I never discuss him with friends. I don't hate him. It's a marvelous character, you could say it's an icon in our society. And the thing about becoming a sort of legend in your own lifetime, that's very fulfilling.

"I was actor, producer, director, writer

Bob Kane on the set of the Batman movie, in England.

and artist. I was the camera eye."

JEFF: *It must be.*

BOB: It really is. You see, the *fans* have the enthusiasm more than I do, and maybe it's hard to understand that. A few weeks ago I went to a hotel out here in L.A., I was the guest of honor and the fans *adored* me -- the adulation, 25 minutes of standing ovation, just to get my autograph or see me smile or shake my hand, you'd think God walked into the room. *(Laughter.)* Sometimes I don't feel *worthy* of all of that. Sometimes I feel that somebody else did it, rather than me. Maybe I'm modest underneath it all. *(Laughter.)* I feel like a big celebrity at a premiere, going to the fans and being the guest of honor, or going on THE TONIGHT SHOW, but when it's quiet, when the Batfad fades into the background, then I'm just another human being. So I don't take it all too seriously, although I enjoy it.

JEFF: *You did create a legend, you really did.*

BOB: Well, yeah. It's quite fulfilling and rewarding -- the top of Mt. Everest is very exhilarating. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *You know, you are lucky in one regard, and that is that there are certainly scores of comic-book creators who never were able to feel the adulation of the fans.*

BOB: Most never do.

JEFF: *Yeah, exactly.*

BOB: But, you see, I do have the personality to go with it. Not to sound egotistical, but I'm 67, I look like 55, 50 on a good day, I have all my hair, I'm tall, dark and handsome, and I have the personality and the charm. I have this. A lot of cartoonists are not handsome and they're not charming, so who wants to interview them? *(Laughter.)* I have everything else going along with it. I *look* like an actor. In Pinewood they set me in a documentary, in Gotham City, and I was was winging it, reminiscing about when I was a kid in New York and how these mean streets looked just like Times Square, and I went down to the corner candy store and there were some BATMAN books on the shelves. *(Laughter.)* Did you know I did the documentary?

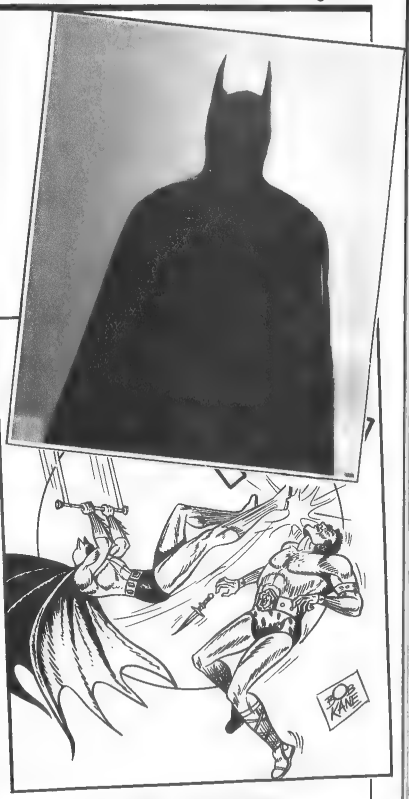
JEFF: *No, I didn't. I'd love to see it.*

BOB: Yeah, I made it at Pinewood, it'll be on television this year. I missed my little minute in the film, but I've got an hour on television. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *That's a good trade.*

BOB: Then from there I went to New York, to a comic convention, for the documentary, and then to DC Comics to talk with the editors.

JEFF: *Bob, would there be any chance*



Here : material from the files of Bob Kane.

"I've read DARK KNIGHT, but I don't understand it."

"I'm not sure I understand, like swastikas on a woman's breasts and buttocks." From Frank Miller's DARK KNIGHT.

that you would either write or draw any Batman adventure again sometime?

BOB: Oh, no, I couldn't. I'm painting. I'm going to have a one-man show on Rodeo Drive about two weeks after the premiere this summer.

JEFF: *Oh, that's great!*

BOB: Absolutely. I have all of my Batman oils and watercolors, and I've been having one-man art shows since I retired in '66 from comic books. I started painting, and I have had one-man shows all over the country. I'm doing two serigraphs, they'll be out in April probably.

JEFF: *Do you know how much those will retail for?*

BOB: Well, unsigned probably $50, and the signed ones $100. Then I'm going to do some serious serigraphs, some lithographs, for the art gallery, and they'll retail for about $600 to start with. This is real fine art.

JEFF: *What about the originals? If a fan reading this decided he had to have a Bob Kane original, what —*

BOB: He'd have to go buy one.

JEFF: *But what would he expect to have to pay for one?*

BOB: Well, at the exhibition there will be some cheaper ones, but I don't think anything will be under $3,000, and then it'll go up to $100,000 on my big oil pieces.

JEFF: *Wow. Is this material that you have hanging in your house now?*

BOB: I have many hanging in the house, and many in a vault out here, all waiting to be put into art shows all over the country.

JEFF: *Well, what do you think of the whole DARK KNIGHT phenomenon of the last couple of years, which really has revivified the character. Were you happy with what Frank Miller did?*

BOB: Well, I've read the book, but I don't understand it. I'm certainly appreciative that it brought the Batman back to the dark, mysteriouso roots that I created him in. However, Frank went to another extreme. Frank is very political, and there is a lot of symbolism in there I'm not sure I understand, like swastikas on a woman's breasts and buttocks. Do you understand what that means?

JEFF: *No. Frankly, that part of it escaped me as well.*

BOB: And why Superman shrivels down to a toothpick from this big, virile guy, and then he becomes reincarnated again into the full body — I don't understand that, do you? I don't understand what he's *talking* about! I don't understand the book. I think the *drawings* are very creative and different and avant-garde, he's a very good artist and I think Frank's a very good writer, but it's not in my tradition.

JEFF: *Did he contact you while he was working on DARK KNIGHT?*

BOB: No, he never contacted me, I never spoke with Frank. I think he's a very talented man, but I'm afraid he's beyond my intelligence. *(Laughter.)* And if *I* don't understand it, as the creator and as an artist, how come the fans understood it? Or did they not understand it — and then why did they buy so many copies of it?

JEFF: *I think it was a very personal expression, and it came at a time when Frank was very popular.*

BOB: Isn't he very popular today?

JEFF: *Sure, and DARK KNIGHT made him even more popular. I think it was probably the most intellectual look at Batman in years and years, and I think people appreciated that.*

BOB: It kind of brought him out of retirement.

JEFF: *Yeah, exactly.*

BOB: But from then on I don't know what he's saying. I've read it five times, I still don't know what he's talking about. I think he's politically oriented, and I'm not sure which area of politics he favors.

JEFF: *I think the two of you should sit down sometime.*

BOB: *(Laughs.)* I'd like to. I'd like to meet him and maybe broaden my scope. I guess I'm still thinking of the '40s and the way that I drew it. I think of **Eddie Duchin** and **Glenn Miller** and **Tony Bennett** and **Frank Sinatra,** I don't think of **Prince** and **Michael Jackson** and **Sting.** It's another generation today, and they're talented for what they do; but they're beyond me and I don't listen to them, I listen to my old records.

JEFF: *One of the things that I've heard about the movie is that Prince is going to do the soundtrack.*

BOB: That's true.

JEFF: *Any thoughts on that? That seems a strange choice.*

BOB: I'm not thrilled about that.

JEFF: (Laughs.) I'm not too surprised. I would have thought this would have been something like a John Williams soundtrack.

BOB: Well, I don't understand what **Prince** is doing, I thought the soundtrack should be mysterious background music *for* this mysteriouso movie. Now, what is he doing, is this going to be a rock soundtrack?

JEFF: *Frankly, I hope not, but I don't know.*

BOB: It might be only the theme song, and then the movie has a soundtrack as all movies do, a theme that plays without the voice, a score. I cannot believe it's

Swastikas on a woman's breasts and buttocks. Do you understand what that means?

going to be rock singing all through the movie, when Batman is chasing the Joker or whatever.

JEFF: *I hope you're right.*

BOB: I'll have to go into Warners and find out just *where* he came in, and *why!* After all, I'm from the **Bing Crosby** era, **Tony Bennett**, so when you talk about the new guys, I'm not too thrilled. *(Laughter.)* **Prince** doesn't thrill me to begin with.

JEFF: *Well, are we going to see an avalanche of Batman merchandising this summer?*

BOB: *Oh*, merchandising is going to be absolutely colossal, they have at least 100 licensees already. I think this year the merchandising will even top the '66 bonanza, which was into over $150 million.

JEFF: *Have you kept a lot of the '66 merchandise items, Bob?*

BOB: No, unfortunately. And I don't have a copy of BATMAN #1.

JEFF: *Really?*

BOB: My ex-wife gave it to a maid — they absconded with about 200 bound issues, from the beginning.

JEFF: *Whoa! I'd like to think that some fan reading this interview will rectify that.*

BOB: I know. To show you how erratic it is, like when I go to a comic convention — and I can understand, because they pay good hard cash to get them — I will say to them, "Listen, I will give you five original drawings and maybe a couple of old BATMAN pages, from me, the creator, for that book." They'd rather keep the book. This seems foolhardy to me, because I'd rather own an original **Picasso** than one of his prints.

JEFF: *I couldn't agree more, if I only had issue #1 we'd have a deal.*

BOB: Yeah. One day one fan will come up and say, "Bob, you know, for all you've done for the industry, here's a BATMAN #1 I'd be very happy to exchange for a couple of your originals." I don't want it for nothing, I just want to exchange.

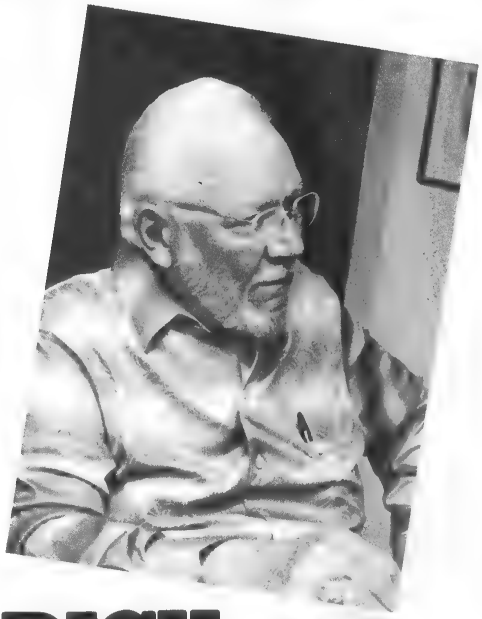
JEFF: *Well, to bring this to a close, Bob, what's the date for this film? When will we be able to see BATMAN in the theaters?*

BOB: June 23 is the rough schedule. If the film isn't ready then, it should be before the July fourth weekend. It's only a few months away at this point. We're all looking forward to it. I think the film will be a blockbuster hit, I really can't see how it will miss. The hype on it is *so* big, and the film will live up to the hype.

JEFF: *Which is the important thing, that it's actually as good as they're making it sound. .*

BOB: Yes. I really feel the film will live up to the hype . . . I feel the film will live up *beyond* the hype! If you go to a theater and listen to the reaction from the minute-and-a-half trailer, there's a big silence when they're showing coming attractions, then the BATMAN trailer comes on and the whole audience goes crazy! I saw it in one of the theaters in Westwood, the audience screamed and clapped their hands and whistled! They want to see more!

"I could see that the pulps were just about to go out of



DICK SPRANG

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business because of the introduction of the comic book."

From the early '40s into the '60s the Batman was handled by several artists other than Bob Kane — creator of the Batman, who did quite a bit of the art as well — who are now fondly remembered as Kane's ghosts. Dick Sprang was one of those men, and the measure of his talent is shown in the fact that the stories he handled are among the most fondly remembered and sought out by collectors, his Joker stories especially. Indeed, there are those who liken Dick Sprang's Batman to Wayne Boring's Superman, meaning the most notable, definitive, expansive, etc. etc. work after that of those characters' creators themselves. So, let's meet Dick Sprang . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *Dick, how did you decide to become a comics artist?*

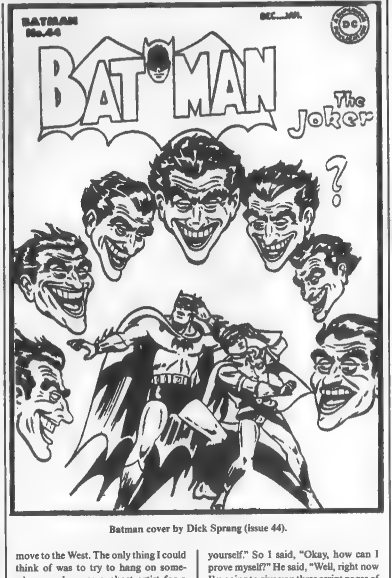
DICK SPRANG: Well, having left a pretty good newspaper job in the Midwest, I had been living in New York for some years, freelancing in the pulps and in advertising illustration. I could see that the pulps were just about to go out of business because of the introduction of the comic book — several of us old pulp artists got together and ascertained this, one of whom was my very good friend of later years, **Mort Weisinger.**

LOU: *I didn't know he was an artist.*

DICK: He was not an artist, he was an editor and a writer of science fiction, and he was also a literary agent for science writers. Anyway, I was fed up with the advertising business, and I had *enjoyed* illustrating for the pulps but they were on the way out, and I also looked ahead several years and thought I'd like to get out of New York City eventually and move to the West. The only thing I could think of was to try to hang on somewhere, perhaps as a ghost artist for a major comic strip. So, I prepared a sample, a big full-page, multi-panel thing showing every type of adventure activity I could think of, illustrated with color washes over black ink, and took it up to DC.

I got in to see **Whitney Ellsworth**, and Whitney liked it. He said, "I'm going to try you out on something." So I said, "Well now, look, before you do, if there's *any* possibility for my getting on with DC, I want to tell you this: After the War" — which, of course, we all knew was coming — "After the War I'd like to leave Manhattan and live in the West. Can we continue to operate by mail?" And he said, "Of course — *if* you prove yourself." So I said, "Okay, how can I prove myself?" He said, "Well, right now I'm going to give you three script pages of a story that's already been done; it's a Batman story that's been published, and I want you to take these three pages home, pencil and ink them. Don't worry about lettering, just follow our guide as to balloon depths and so on — but I want to see your pencils, and your ink over the pencils. I'd like to have it back in four days." Three pages in four days, pencilled and inked. I left there scared to death but walking on air. *(Laughter.)*

I brought them in on the fourth day, he looked at them, picked up the phone, and then called the comptroller and told him to make out a check for me at the standard pay rate at that time. I said, "My God, this has already been pub-



Batman cover by Dick Sprang (issue 44).

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dick Sprang
Born: 28 July 1915 — Fremont, OH
Wife: Marion
Occupation: Artist
Films Influenced the Most By: BIRTH OF A NATION by D.W. Griffith; the early TEN COMMANDMENTS by DeMille; THE BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN and some other foreign films; CITIZEN KANE, which to me was a landmark; some of the early John Ford stuff; and I liked the first SUPERMAN movie very much

"I was very pleased to follow Kane's work — after all

Mr. Sprang's beautifully-detailed center spread from DETECTIVE COMICS #572 (1987). Next page: artwork from DC's buttons.

listed." He said, "That makes no difference, I just wanted to see what you could do." And I said, "Well, I consulted BATMAN magazines — not the one in which this was published, I didn't even try to look for it." And he said, "That's obvious because you didn't follow the published work." Then he gave me a thirteen-page story to see what I could do with it, and he said, "I'd like to have that back here, inked, in fifteen days." So I went home and did it, brought it back. He went through it — not rapidly, not slowly, all thirteen pages — squared them up on his desk, laid them down, and called the comptroller and paid me full page rate.

So I said, "Look, Mr. Ellsworth, I've been freelancing in New York for about four years, and in a job of this magnitude I have *never* delivered *anything* where the editor did not want some changes." He said, "Yeah, that's the way they operate around here, but that's not the way *I* operate. We have a bullpen where we have some very skilled artists working on salary, and if we find that we need a change in your work, a *minor* change, they'll do it. We'll not bother you with a minor change." And do you know, Lou, that for all those years I never had to make a change.

LOU: *I believe that.*

DICK: Well, thank you. Anyway, *that*, of course, gave me a great boost, and from there on I continued on.

LOU: *Now, your early work is pretty hard to distinguish from the rest of the Kane ghosts, but you soon evolved a distinctive style that set you miles away from Kane. How did that come about?*

DICK: Well, perhaps gradually. At first, of course, I was very *pleased* to follow Kane's work — after all he created the character, and the strip was already quite popular. I followed the figure quite closely. I changed it somewhat, I think I thickened the waist slightly, made him perhaps a bit more athletic and resilient in action. But I did, right from the beginning, incorporate some of my sense of graphic design into the storytelling — action, camera angles, various points of view — that I didn't find *too* much in Mr. Kane's work.

As time went on I got a little worried about this and I asked Whitney Ellsworth, who was the editor I worked with almost exclusively in those early years — a *splendid* man, by the way — I said, "Look, I'm sort of departing from the former style. I'm sort of using movie techniques, camera angles all around and so on. What do you think of that? Am I departing too much?" And he said, "Heavens, no! Go ahead, shoot it the

he created the character, and the strip was popular."

way you see it." So I did. And having been quite an observer of motion pictures, having at the age of seventeen painted a lot of movie posters in my little hometown — in those days they did use painted posters, and I got free passes so I saw a lot of movies. *(Laughter.)* Well, I sort of absorbed those movie techniques, and I tried to impart that in my graphic work.

Now, this had been done before, of course, by several men, most notably **Milton Caniff** — moving the camera around, using the movie techniques, using the frozen frame; moviemakers call the *apex* of action the still shot. So I continued with this. Finally Whit said, "Go any way you want. Forget about how Batman looks *exactly.* If you want to change him somewhat, and Robin somewhat, go ahead." Well, I thought this over and I decided not to, because I thought the character as it was originally created by **Kane**, and *slightly* more developed by several of us who were working on the strip, should be retained — as it is not retained today, as you well know.

LOU: *Right.*

DICK: So I continued. I went all-out with my ideas on page composition, of the flow and rhythm of sequential panels. And they liked it. That's about it.

LOU: *Well, I liked it too. I always admired your sense of perspective, shadow, kinetic energy, and the blueprint-like panels and the like. Seeing as how practically all of your work dealt with Batman, how did you relate to the character over the years?*

DICK: How did I *relate* to him? I related to him as a hero type with which the reader would identify, which of course is the basis for all successful popular fiction. The reader *becomes* Batman, or Robin, whatever his tastes may be. So, I wanted to keep the guy as a folk hero. And he wasn't invulnerable, as Superman was, so as a result the guy met a lot of challenges, which of course made the stories more interesting. Go ahead, ask another question. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Now, most of your villain work was doing the Joker, right?*

DICK: Oh, yeah.

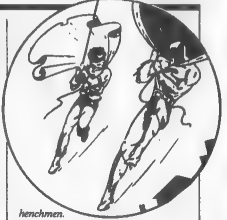
LOU: *You had an engaging Joker, he always seemed to have that foot-long grin, always seemed to be very energetic. Did you relate to him in any particular way?*

DICK: Well yeah, I *enjoyed* the guy. It was *fun* to move him around and put on his crazy activities. *(Laughter.)* And the same with the Penguin. But I did enjoy the Joker more than any other character. I don't know if I contributed anything different from what had been done before. I think **Jerry Robinson's** interpretation of the Joker — I think he was the first artist to draw it, other than perhaps **Kane's** pencils — was the *classic* Joker, and I tried to stay with it as closely as I could. But inevitably an individual artist contributes something of his own subconscious into the character, and I think perhaps I did. Anyway, I hope it was a success.

LOU: *I'd say so. He was more of a funny character, comedic character, back then, rather than the killer type that he became later.*

DICK: Yeah, right.

LOU: *When I think back on your Joker stories, the image I get is somebody who likes to play a lot of practical jokes and was continually testing them out on his henchmen.*



DICK: Yeah, he wasn't a *killer* then. Later he became one. I don't follow the comics too closely anymore, although I did see this new book THE KILLING JOKE. The artist who did that is superb, a *terrific* artist.

LOU: *Brian Bolland.*

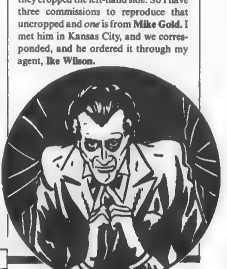
DICK: Deserving of all possible praise.

LOU: *What did you think about the story?*

DICK: It was okay. I didn't particularly care for some of the *gruesome* elements, like the shooting of the Batgirl and Commissioner Gordon. But I thought the ending was fun! It was good! Walking on a beam of light, that was great! *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Yeah, his joke. One thing that I caught, while doing research, is the Joker's utility belt from one of the stories that you did was adapted for I think the first Joker story on the BATMAN TV show in 1966. Did you catch that one on TV?*

DICK: No, I did not. I have several commissions to reproduce that cover from BATMAN #73. What they did, they used the splash page for the cover; they cropped the left-hand side. So I have three commissions to reproduce that uncropped and *one* is from **Mike Gold.** I met him in Kansas City, and we corresponded, and he ordered it through my agent, **Ike Wilson.**



"The redesign of the original Batplane . . . I did that."

AND SO, THE BATCAVE SOON STARTS TO HUM WITH CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY...
THE NEW BATPLANE CAN ALSO CONVERT INTO A HELICOPTER OR A HOVERCRAFT...
WOW! A BATMARINE!
THESE "HUMAN EJECTOR" TUBES ARE THE ESCAPE HATCHES
YES—AND THEY'LL ALSO GET US OUT OF THE BATMARINE.
BUT ELSEWHERE, OTHER BATMANES ARE BEING SHAPED...
BATMAN IS BUILDING A NEW BATPLANE!
BATPLANES AND DNA...
CAN'T JUST BE BULL WORKING ON THAT MUCH!

The creation of the Batplane . . . by Sprang & Co. (BATMAN #61, 1950).

LOU: *Well, the thing I realised while I was doing research for the article was that you visually designed, in the late '40s and early '50s, the classic Batmobile, Batplane, Batmarine, and you could almost say the Batcave, and a lot of the equipment he used. All of those things were first designed in stories you did, weren't they?*

DICK: Well, some of them were. The redesign of the original Batplane, Batplane II, was reprinted in the recent BATMAN book. It was poorly reprinted, by the way — they had to shoot it from the comic's page, they didn't have negatives of the original art. I did that. And the Batmobile, the *second* Batmobile, I modelled it after whatever was the current far-out car of that era. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *For 1950 it was pretty far out.*

DICK: And as far as the Batcave and the trophy room and so on, I think any contributions I made to that were done in WORLD'S FINEST, where I did almost all of my letter work — some 40 stories according to **Gene Reed**, with Batman and Superman.

LOU: *And WORLD'S FINEST was under Mort Weisinger's editorship, but you worked under Jack Schiff on BATMAN, right?*

DICK: Right. In the early days we worked under all three, everybody pitched in. You see, this was quite a new thing, the comic-book story, the *long* story — totally different from the single illustration of the pulps, totally different from the Sunday page or the daily strip — and we were experimenting. So, Mort and Jack and Whitney had ideas about what should be done, and we would discuss them a little bit, and go ahead. Now, I never worked in the office, I never worked in the bullpen, I always worked at home; so I did *not* meet hardly *any* of my contemporaries working on the comics.

But I did have a close association in the office with these three men, and Mort became my very good friend in later years when I was working on WORLD'S FINEST. He had then become the Superman editor, while **Jack Schiff** was still editing some of the stories, while . . . Whit I don't think ever edited them physically. But my association with those three men and later

"I was fed up with the advertising business."

The BIG PROPS . . . from Dick's "The Joker's Utility Belt" story (BATMAN #73, 1953).

Murray Boltinoff was *so* productive, and any credit that I get today for the work that I did, *much* of that credit *belongs* to those men. They were superb, they were top editors, and they actually established National Comics as a going unit — and that later became DC. So to them I extend all credit.

LOU: *Since you didn't have much contact with other artists, I assume you didn't have any contact with the scripters either?*

DICK: No, I didn't. I met a couple of them, I met **Lou Cameron**, but I doubt if I ever met **Bill Finger.** But of course he was my favorite writer. He was tops. He was the grand writer of the early-day comics, to my mind. I thoroughly enjoyed working on his scripts. Unlike some writers he had a *fantastic* developed sense of visualization, and he wrote his stories so they *could* be illustrated.

LOU: *Did you do any of the big prop stories with him?*

DICK: Oh, yeah. He was a genius at these big props. I think there was another guy by the name of **Ed Hamilton**, who wrote some of those back in time stories, which I thoroughly enjoyed doing.

LOU: *Do you have a particular favorite story among the ones you illustrated for BATMAN?*

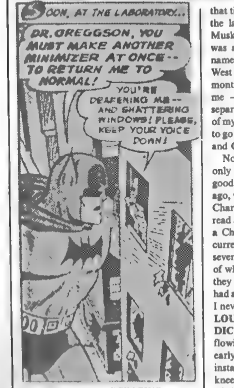
DICK: Well . . . you know, I haven't gone through my old books hardly at all recently. I liked the Three Musketeers story in BATMAN #32 — I still retain the original art on that one — **and** I like my reprise of it that was done in WORLD'S FINEST #82 many years later, "The Super Three Musketeers." I liked it because it was historical, and I'm sort of a history nut. Also I like architecture, and I loved to illustrate foreign settings, Rome, Greece, Egypt, France, Olde England. I can't think of a particular favorite. When we're finished I'll probably come up with a super one. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Well, let me ask a technical question. Charlie Paris inked you exclusively after 1946, or so I'm told. How did that come about?*

DICK: That was strictly the decision of DC Comics. Now, I quit inking about

"After about 25 years I realized I was not approaching my work

MOMENTS LATER, AS THE GIANT BATMAN BOUNCES HIS WAY OUT OF THE BURNAY ENTRANCE...
BATMAN, GET OUT QUICK OR YOU'LL BE STUCK TIGHT!
TIGHT SQUEEZE... PUFF--MADE IT! I ALMOST GOT AWAY WITH THE MINIMIZER!
I'VE FINALLY STOPPED GROWING-- BUT I'M THIRTY FEET HIGH! ROBIN, I'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO NORMAL SIZE!
OH, OH--ALMOST RAN INTO THE OVERHEAD ELECTRIC WIRES! I HAVE TO WATCH THAT!
OH, NO! I'VE MADE ANOTHER MINIMIZER WE'LL GO BACK TO HIS LABORATORY!
IT'S LIKE A STRANGE DREAM-- BUT THIS IS REAL!


SOON, AT THE LABORATORY...
DR. GREGGSON, YOU MUST MAKE ANOTHER MINIMIZER AT ONCE-- TO RETURN ME TO NORMAL!
YOU'RE DEAFENING ME-- AND SHATTERING WINDOWS! PLEASE, KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN!

From 1950: DETECTIVE COMICS #156 (by Sprang).

that time, I think, around 1945 or '46 — the last story I inked was that Three Musketeers story. Anyway, then there was another inker came along by the name of **Eugene McDonald.** I moved out West in 1946 and he came out a couple of months later and lived in Arizona with me — not exactly *with* me, we had separate abodes — and he inked several of my stories. Then it seemed that he had to go back to New York for some reason, and **Charlie Paris** took over.

Now, I had met Charlie in New York only to say hello to. Today we are very good friends; I met him again two years ago, where we had a good long visit. But Charlie was a *superb* inker. I recently read a transcript of a panel diacussion at a Chicago Comic Convention that occurred back in the early 1980s, where several artists were asked their opinions of what happened to their pencils when they were inked by others. All of them had a somewhat negative response. Well, I never did.

LOU: *I wouldn't think you would, either.*

DICK: I used the energetic brushline, the flowing line, the thick and thin line. My early pencils were *very* tight — for instance, on Batman's thigh, from the knee up to the hip I would vary the width of that line. That kind of a line gives roundness to the thigh, to the leg, and so on. I would *pencil* it that way because at that time I really didn't know who in the heck was inking it, and I wanted to retain that fluid, energetic line. Well, Charlie retained it beautifully. After I saw some of the published work and realized that it was **Paris** doing it, there was no longer any need for me to pencil the lines in the fashion I had done before. All I had to do was just give the outline and Charlie, with his *great* talent, would ink the thing beautifully.

Charlie was a superb craftsman — still is. He doesn't do any more inking, but he's one of the giants of the industry as far as I am concerned. I was extremely satisfied with all of the inking he did, and so I disagree with the men at Chicago. I think early on there were some inkers that did a few things with a very skinny line on some of my pencils, in fact it was so different from my inking that it's almost hard to recognize today as my pencils. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Did you ever get any fan reaction to your work, or from other artists?*

DICK: Not at the time, nobody knew who I was except the editorial crew and perhaps a few artists. It was only in the early 1970s that I met a young guy up at the University of Northern Arizona, where I lectured about comic art to a commercial art class, who *informed* me

with enthusiasm, and I decided I was probably burned out."

that I was well known. *(Laughter.)* And that a lot of people admired my work — for which I was grateful to hear. But I never received *any* input . . . oh, I hate that damn word — *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Reaction.*

DICK: Reaction. I never received any reaction from other artists. **Charlie Paris** told me a couple of years ago that he thought I was the best penciller in the business, but that's all I can recall. I don't *know* any other old-time artists.

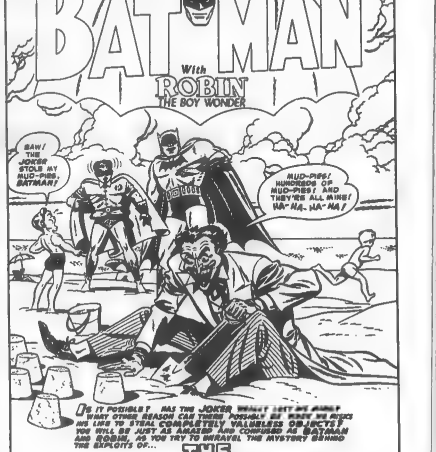
LOU: *Well, why did you get out of comics around 1963 there, Dick?*

DICK: I'll tell you, the bloom had worn off the rose. It used to be when I got a script in the mail it was a joy to receive, I would read it over immediately, and then the next day I would start in on it. By that time my subconscious had gone to work on it. Every page was a challenge, but I would dredge up from my subconscious my observations on drama and so forth, good action art as I had recognized it and seen it, and the great illustrators like **N.C. Wyeth** and others of his era, and it was fun! After about 25 years I realized that I was not approaching my work anymore with that enthusiasm, and I decided that I was probably becoming a bit burned out. I thought that I had better quit while I was ahead of the game — if I was ever ahead of it. I mean, I wanted to always maintain the quality I *thought* I had established, and I saw that perhaps it was going downhill, so I decided to quit. It was of my own volition, I resigned voluntarily.

Whitney had told me years before, and so had other editors up there, that I could continue with BATMAN as long as there *was* a BATMAN, and that was true! So, it was really sort of a disappointment with my own approach to the work, and I thought it was necessary to preserve my own sense of . . . oh, what shall I call it . . . my own sense of dedication to the job, that I better get out. Now, I was not one of these guys who considered comic art as something of a low status, because I thought that continuity art *really* presented a heck of a challenge! I wanted to keep that up. Well, today we have artists who are *far* ahead of me in their concept of dramatic action on the page — the rhythm, the pace, the vigor; the *excitement* that they extract from the reader is *there!* And I think it was time for me to get out, because better men were coming along, and that was fine.

LOU: *Well, that's a value judgment, but I would say you're one of the best ones I have seen on the feature, definitely.*

DICK: Thank you.


BAT-MAN
With
ROBIN
THE BOY WONDER
BAW! THE JOKER STOLE MY MUD-PIES, BATMAN!
MUD-PIES! HUNDREDS OF MUD-PIES! AND THEY'RE ALL MINE! HA-HA-HA-HA!
IS IT POSSIBLE? HAS THE JOKER WHOLLY LOST HIS MIND? WHAT OTHER REASON CAN THERE POSSIBLY BE FOR HIS NEED FOR HIS LIKE TO STEAL COMPLETELY USELESS OBJECTS? YOU WILL BE JUST AS AMAZED AND CONFUSED AS BATMAN AND ROBIN, AS YOU TRY TO UNRAVEL THE MYSTERY BEHIND THE EXPLOITS OF...
THE CRAZY CRIME CLOWN!

Splash from Sprang's "The Crazy Crime Clown".

LOU: *So, I guess around that time, shortly afterwards, was when the "New Look" came in — when Julie Schwartz took over the character, and Carmine Infantino and some of the others started pencilling it. And then about three years after you left the BATMAN TV show made it big. Did you ever see any of those?*

DICK: Yes, I did see a few.

LOU: *What was your impression of that?*

DICK: Well, it was campy, it was kind of funny, I got a kick out of it, but I didn't think it presented the character as *I* would have had *I* been in charge of the production. I was asked to go to Hollywood, I think Whitney asked me if I would go out there and work on some of the scripts and stories and so on, be sort of a technical advisor. I said, "No, I don't think so; I think I'm too old to get mixed up in that Hollywood environment." *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *I think he made the same offer to Bill Finger, or somebody did, and he also turned them down.*

DICK: Yeah. Well, you know, that's a whole different way of life out there, and I didn't particularly care for it. I've always *regretted* that I hadn't been born about 25 years earlier and could have gotten in on the *origins* of the motion picture industry. *That* must have been the damndest fun anybody could have had! Going out there with **Lasky** and **DeMille** and shooting off the cuff, that

"I considered myself as sort of a movie camera — moving."

Poster art from the "original" Batman movie (105 minutes, 1966).

would have been fun.

LOU: *Well, now the BATMAN movie has brought you and some other BATMAN creators back into the attention of the fans. What's your general impression of the BATMAN activity that's gearing up?*

DICK: Well, I don't know. This young man, **Michael Keaton,** I saw him in an earlier movie and I like the guy, I liked his sort of laid back humorous approach to whatever role he was playing — but I couldn't quite see him as Batman. I guess they have this inflated suit, I don't know what it is. *(Laughter.)* Anyway, it makes him look quite heroic, but I don't know how his voice is going to come over as this great cult hero. I don't know, I really don't know.

LOU: *By any chance have you seen the clips with Jack Nicholson as the Joker.*

DICK: Yeah, I think he'll do a hell of a job. **Jack Nicholson** can do anything well, I believe. I'm looking forward to it.

LOU: *Dick, what have you been doing since you left comics back in '83?*

DICK: I was ranching up in Utah. I was running the Colorado River in my own boat. I was exploring the canyons, working with the historical societies on historical investigation of the old Western pioneer trails. I did very little artwork. I did a documentary piece on the Civil War, a huge project, just for my own amusement and amazement. *Lately,* in the '80s, I've been doing some re-creations of my old BATMAN and DETECTIVE COMICS covers in full-color and large size, 13 by 18. I am licensed by DC Comics to do this. Also, I am licensed to do conceptual art for collectors, in black and white or color, as long as all of the proper copyright and trademark notices are inscribed on the work. And occasionally I will receive a commission from DC Comics for a pinup page — one will appear in DETECTIVE COMICS #600. I just finished one for the BATMAN ANNUAL for 1989. And I did a double-page spread for the DETECTIVE COMICS 50th anniversary issue a couple of years ago. Any collectors and fans who may wish to commission artwork may contact my agent, **Ike Wilson,** at 2904 Rankin Terrace, Edmond, Oklahoma 73013.

LOU: *Do you have any fond memories of working in comics?*

DICK: Sure. I enjoyed the work. I always considered myself as sort of a movie camera — moving around, probing, trying to get the best effect of movement and suspense, and evoking a mood. A composition of panels establishes danger, serenity, suspense, fear, humor, all by the arrangement of the panel components. This is a challenge. But it is also a great reward if you have satisfied yourself — which, of course, an artist never does — that you have accomplished *something* that will advance the story.

I thoroughly enjoyed working with **Whitney Ellsworth** and **Jack Schiff** and, of course, **Mort Weisinger,** in the years that I lived in New York and I was associated personally with them. I left New York in 1946 to move to Arizona and I have been here ever since, and I did all of my work by mail, and we had very little contact. Jack would send me a script and it would have a little note with it giving me the deadline and so on. Mort

"I thought any day these editors could say, 'Goodbye, Sprang.'"

would send me a script when I was working on WORLD'S FINEST, with a little note. And I always enjoyed that, but of course there was no longer the personal contact. I always held those men in great regard and that was one of my great enjoyments.

And today I am receiving quite a bit of adulation, I guess you'd call it, from fans and collectors, and of course *that's* enjoyable. But I am highly suspicious of believing my own publicity. *(Laughter.)* I really am. I appreciate it, I'm grateful, it gives me a very warm feeling, and I respond to these people with great respect — that has added additional enjoyment.

But during the years I was working on it I enjoyed *doing* the stories. It was always a challenge, and I tried to do them as I saw them, and evidently the publishers liked them. I remember occasionally I would get a little worried. I was living here 2,500 miles from New York and I knew damn well there were young artists walking into that office with samples that were better drawn than my work. I thought any day these editors could say, "Goodbye, **Sprang.**" But they didn't. Occasionally I would write a little letter to Jack or Mort and say, "Hey, how's my stuff doing? Am I okay? Am I going astray anywhere? Tell me, for God's sake!" Then I'd get a letter back that would say, "We don't know what you're *talking* about!" *(Laughter.) That* was enjoyable.

LOU: *Those kind of notes everybody should get.*

DICK: Yeah. Anyway, I have great respect for DC of that age, because I knew them intimately. I know hardly anyone today at DC, except **Mike Gold, Dick Giordano** and **Pat Bastienne,** all of whom I met for the first time in Kansas City last October. I consider them to be very fine professionals. But I'm an old-timer and my associations are with the past.

"HIGH CLASS INTERGALACTIC HIGH JINKS"

X-THIEVES
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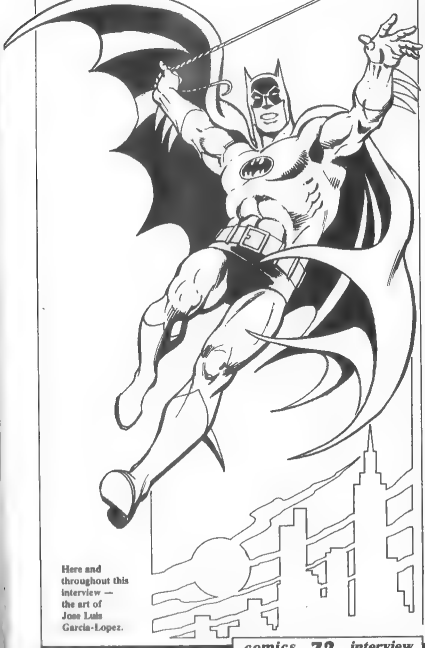
"We're hoping to use this system with DC

TOM COOK



Here and throughout this interview — the art of Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez.

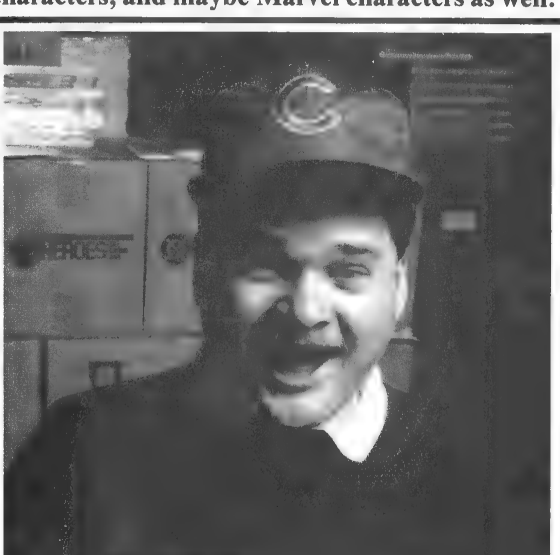
Comics changed slowly over a very long period of time — from the mid '50s into the '80s. That's not to say that there weren't a lot of major developments during that time. Of course there were, the reintroduction of the superhero with the Flash in 1956, Stan Lee's revolutionary innovations in the early '60s, and on and on. But in a sense all those guys in long johns stayed pretty much the same, their worlds were defined and over time became more acutely defined, and inevitably they pretty much ran in place. This reached a climax in the '80s when the big two, DC and Marvel, felt the need to quantify and qualify, to delineate their respective universes in such a way that everything fit in place and they could prove it. Curiously, as it happened, role playing games based on those superheroes evolved at around the same time — to observe the coincidence. And wouldn't you know it, just when they found a viable expanding market for such highly delineated fare, they started reshaping the world . . .

DARREL L. BOATZ: *I understand the DC HEROES role playing game is being revamped. It doesn't seem like very much time has passed since the game came out. Why is it being revamped?*

TOM COOK: Well, besides the marketing standpoint — we understand CHAMPIONS is being updated, and they're thinking about updating MARVEL SUPER-HEROES — but speaking strictly about DC HEROES, so *much* has occurred in the DC Universe, in the comic books. When you spoke to Greg and Sam originally the big problem was CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS, which at the time was causing such big changes that we never knew how the game was going to end up. Since then the DC Universe has gone through the final processes of CRISIS, LEGENDS, MILLENNIUM, there have been a lot of changes, and most of the characters have undergone alterations in their basic structures and histories. The game is

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1989 DC Comics, Inc

characters, and maybe Marvel characters as well."



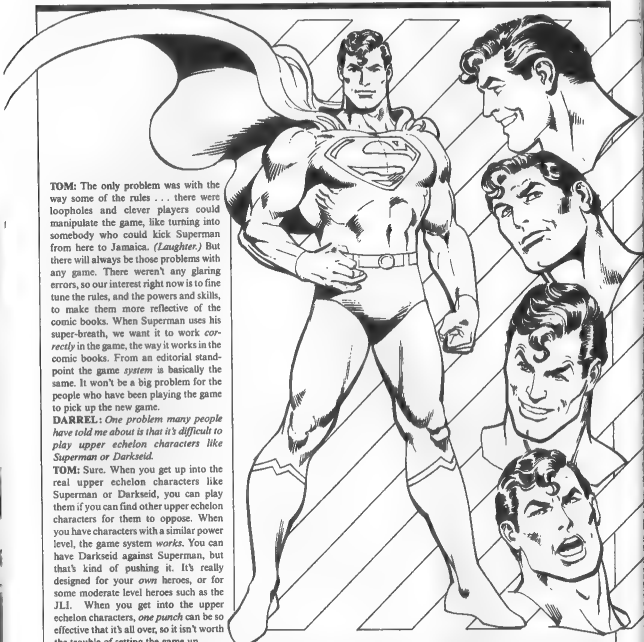
being updated to reflect those changes. We really try to first of all make the game work and be accessible so that everybody out there can play it, and along with that we really *try* to reflect the DC Universe as much as possible.

DARREL: *Superman was downgraded when John Byrne came along — I mean he's no longer the guy that punches planets out of orbit —*

TOM: Exactly, and the original game system was based on Superman. He was the archetype hero that we used, and at that time he was much more powerful. So many changes have occurred that the original game no longer reflects the DC Universe, so we decided to rewrite the game.

DARREL: *Were there any problems with the game itself, the rules and how it played, that you wanted to fix?*

"I certainly do not espouse anything that role playing is Satanic."



TOM: The only problem was with the way some of the rules . . . there were loopholes and clever players could manipulate the game, like turning into somebody who could kick Superman from here to Jamaica. *(Laughter.)* But there will always be those problems with any game. There weren't any glaring errors, so our interest right now is to fine tune the rules, and the powers and skills, to make them more reflective of the comic books. When Superman uses his super-breath, we want it to work *correctly* in the game, the way it works in the comic books. From an editorial standpoint the game *system* is basically the same. It won't be a big problem for the people who have been playing the game to pick up the new game.

DARREL: *One problem many people have told me about is that it's difficult to play upper echelon characters like Superman or Darkseid.*

TOM: Sure. When you get up into the real upper echelon characters like Superman or Darkseid, you can play them if you can find other upper echelon characters for them to oppose. When you have characters with a similar power level, the game system *works*. You can have Darkseid against Superman, but that's kind of pushing it. It's really designed for your *own* heroes, or for some moderate level heroes such as the JLI. When you get into the upper echelon characters, *one punch* can be so effective that it's all over, so it isn't worth the trouble of setting the game up.

DARREL: *Would that be an area you're concentrating on, as far as changing the basic game itself?*

TOM: On changing the game mechanics, the game system, 90% of it is staying the same. **Ray Winninger** is doing the revision of the game mechanics, and what Ray is concentrating on is getting a real uniformity among all of the characters. After the first DC HEROES game out, the master set, we came out with supplements, modules, and there have been discrepancies, like a character's strength is listed as *x* here and *y* someplace else. There were always problems with that, with things that just didn't agree. In some adventures different rules would crop up. New powers would crop up that were barely changed from another power.

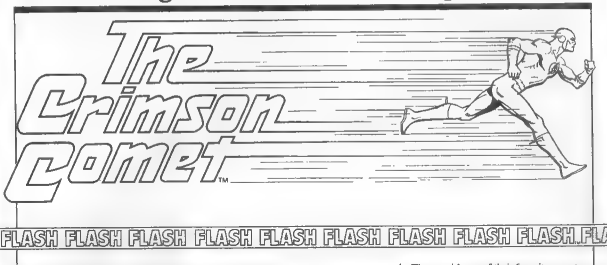
So what Ray is concentrating on is making everything very uniform. There aren't going to be any duplicated powers, there aren't going to be redundant rules. And from this point on, after these revisions, here in editorial we're going to pay particularly close attention to making sure it stays that way. If somebody writes a BATMAN module, for instance, we're going to make sure that Batman's strength doesn't change. We're not going to allow these discrepancies into the game.

DARREL: *Going back to the original DC HEROES master set, how has that been received by the public?*

TOM: To be candid, the problem that I've seen — I came in here in '85 having had nominal role playing experience, some D&D and that was about it, so I

TOM COOK

"The other games have 'beat 'em up' systems."



FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH FLA

really had very little idea what the whole role-playing industry was like — to the thing that I found, and that we're much more cognizant of right now, is that Mayfair in the industry is not as well known as we'd like. One of the problems with the DC game is that we're fighting against a really well known company and a really well known game, TSR's Marvel game. When we go out to conventions we find that a lot of people are playing the Marvel game, and we have to kind of *coax* people over to play the DC game. They really seem to enjoy DC HEROES when they *play* it, which is something we're all proud of — people really *enjoy* playing the DC game. But the main problem is that not a lot of people are playing it, not as many as we would like. So we're giving a push to getting out to the comics fans at the conventions and so on, and having people start playing the game, being aware of the game in general.

DARREL: *The big thing that DC HEROES introduced was the mechanism for playing subplots.*

TOM: Right.

DARREL: *How has that been received?*

TOM: I think you have to compare DC HEROES to other superhero role playing games — DC does that better than any of the others. The other games are very interested in comparing the powers, they have "beat 'em up" type systems — not to denigrate them, they're all a lot of fun — but the thing people enjoy about the DC game is that there's a lot more *personal* interaction between the players, on a real life player level, and between the characters that they're playing. There's a lot more opportunity to be buddies, and have a little bit more fun with the characters, when you're not just concentrating on beating up the villains. That portion of it, whether you're actually playing subplots — I have to get medicine for my ailing aunt, I have to go to my job, I don't have time to go off and fight Darkseid today — you can do that, have the interaction on a player or a character level, and that's really been very well received by the people we've talked to. They say it's one of their favorite aspects of the game.

DARREL: *I think that's great, because while admittedly the physical conflicts and the epic battles are a big part of superheroes, it's the characters themselves that a lot of people really get into.*

TOM: Right. I've been reading comic books since I was about four years old, I grew up with Marvel and read DC quite a bit, and the thing that always interested me was not how Superman was going to save the world this time, it was how Clark Kent's personal life would be affected by all of this. That's what a lot of people find interesting in comic books — not the superhero persona but the person of the character, the secret identity.

DARREL: *Like lately in WONDER WOMAN a lot of the — well, she doesn't have a secret identity —*

TOM: Right.

DARREL: *But the interaction between Wonder Woman and the various supporting characters is what's really interesting in that book.*

TOM: Yes. George Perez worked very

"We never knew how the game was going to end up."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Tom Cook
Born: 23 Sept. 1962 — Indianapolis
Occupation: Senior Editor, Mayfair Games
Education: BAs in English and in Film Criticism
Favorite Comic Books: I'll be fired! *(Laughter)* WONDER WOMAN; SPIDER-MAN: I have a great appreciation for DARK KNIGHT; and to go back a ways, the original SILVER SURFER
Favorite Books: I'm fond of Stephen King
Favorite Films: CITIZEN KANE, anything by Alfred Hitchcock — I'm really into film noir
Pet Peeve: Colorization. Show me something in black and white and I'll watch it.

closely with **Dan Greenberg** on our WONDER WOMAN material, STRANGERS IN PARADISE, an adventure and sourcebook which came out last fall, and WAR OF THE GODS which is due out this spring, which has Superman and Wonder Woman together. George is a real nice guy, and that's something that he has commented on — in fact he doesn't call her Wonder Woman, he calls her Diana. He really has a love for the characters and that's how he deals with them. When he's talking about Julia Kapatellis, he's talking about a real person, like you could pick up the phone and have a conversation with her, and that really comes out in WONDER WOMAN.

And that seems to be happening more and more in comics, where the characters are becoming almost real people. Comics are maturing, have matured quite a bit, and — not to get real heavy or anything — but I think they do a good job in providing role models for kids today. Also, they seriously deal with real issues, with drugs and crime and the homeless and things like that, and it's being done responsibly.

DARREL: *Well, I really can't think of anything further to ask about DC HEROES. Is there anything else that you want to add?*

TOM: That's really about it. I think it will look a lot sharper. Here at Mayfair we're proud of bringing out higher quality products, and the original DC HEROES set was very good, and we now want to make it a lot sharper.

DARREL: *Is there anything else Mayfair's involved in that COMICS INTERVIEW readers will be interested in?*

TOM: Well, let's see . . . We're working on a role playing game based on MYTHADVENTURES — do you know about that?

DARREL: *The Robert Asprin material?*

TOM: Right. I hadn't read the books before this project came up; I knew very little about it, and now I love them. It's really a very enjoyable game; we've had a lot of fun with it, and if you like the books then I can't imagine how you wouldn't like the game. We've also got an AD&D system that fantasy fans should really like, CITY-STATE OF THE INVINCIBLE OVERLORD. That's been out for over a year and we have supplement adventures to go with it. It's a fantasy system where the master set contains all the information about this "world" where all these adventures take place, and it has been well received in fantasy gaming circles.

Then also in the comic-book vein we're working with Nova Games, which is another gaming company. They have a line called LOST WORLDS, an interactive game where you have a little booklet and I have a little booklet, we've each got a character. It's a real nice little system where you can sit down and in about 15 minutes put on a little battle — I have a number for an action, you have a number for an action, and by cross-referencing you find out what the result is. They've had that system around for quite a while, and we're *hoping* to use this system with the DC characters, and maybe even the Marvel characters as well.

DARREL: *A coup!*

TOM: Right. *(Laughter.)* That should be a lot of fun. It's a *really* enjoyable game, especially since it's so easy to learn, and one thing about the role playing games is they can take up so much space that if you're a game collector — like **Darwin Bromley** is, the president of our company — then you've got shelves and shelves of games, you run out of places to store them. But these LOST WORLDS booklets are, like, comic-book size. And it's a fairly well known system in the gaming industry.

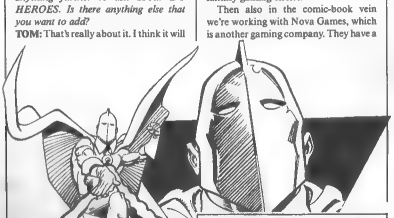
DARREL: *One last topic I'd like to get to, when I spoke with Greg and Sam originally role playing was still going through the . . . you know, the controversial stage of being mistrusted by society at large.*

TOM: Right.

DARREL: *It had cooled down some at that time, and it seems to have cooled down quite a bit since.*

TOM: Very much so. To address the suicide issue — whether or not that's what you're asking — that's certainly tragic whether it's game related or whatever. I really think that people who commit suicide are emotionally or mentally unstable at the time, where pretty much anything may set them off, unfortunately. In most if not all of these cases, when you get right down to it, gaming really has very little or nothing to do with what happened. And I certainly do not espouse anything that role playing is satanic. The majority of people involved in role playing are very friendly people, and many are very devoutly religious. I've always thought, even before I came to work here, that role playing was a real good way to meet people, make friends, and have a little fun doing something. It really helps bring people together.

(Shortly after this interview was conducted, Tom Cook left Mayfair Games to enter the graduate program in film studies and production at the University of Southern California.)



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RON

"What I've done is basically made clear choices."

MANN

MARTY HERZOG: *Ron, you say that you were heavily influenced by MAD, and yet you're only 30 years old so obviously you're talking about MAD MAGAZINE.*

RON MANN: I had an older brother who would pass it on to me, the MAD comic book and magazine, and I started collecting at a very young age.

MARTY: *Would you call yourself a collector?*

RON: No, not at all. When I was growing up I *did* collect every issue of the MAD comic and the MAD magazine, and then . . . I guess my mother found them and threw them out

MARTY: *Oh, you had one of those, too.*

RON: Yeah. That was the reason I started this film, I really wanted to understand why, my mother, and what the attitudes and perceptions were of comics, why it was so negative. I had never picked up a comic book since that time — really, I had no *idea* of what was going on in comic books.

MARTY: *What, was there a gap in your life somewhere that —*

RON: Sure. I mean since 12 years old I hadn't picked up a comic book.

MARTY: *Until?*

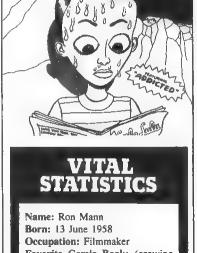
RON: Until I met **bp Nickol,** who is an *avid* comic-book collector and also one of the people who started in the first underground Canadian comic, called SCRAPTURES. *He* has an *incredible* collection of comics, and he reintroduced me to comic books.

MARTY: *When was that?*

RON: In 1985

MARTY: *Relatively recently*

RON: Yeah. I was writing a screenplay for **Ivan Reitman,** who did GHOSTBUSTERS, and around in 1985 I had visited **with bp** and I saw his collection and I was absolutely fascinated. I was very fortunate to be involved with Ivan, but I got kind of *bored* with what I was writing, as all writers do, and you just kind of look for an escape from what you're currently working on So I went to the San Diego comic-book convention just based on my interaction with bp on comic books, it started to interest me. And there is a gentleman by the name of **Charlie Lippincott** in Los Angeles also, who I knew very well, who is an avid jazz fan but I didn't know he was also a comic-book fan, and we both went to San Diego. And it was a real *shock* for me because there were 10,000 comic-book people there, and an *incredible* amount of comic books. I had *never* realized there was a real history to comics, or that it was a real, vital, important artistic medium. I had never considered comics that way at all, I thought it was a benign medium, children's literature, nothing really important to say about the world.



VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ron Mann
Born: 13 June 1958
Occupation: Filmmaker
Favorite Comic Book: (growing up) MAD; (currently) the last one I read was NEAT STUFF. I really liked it a lot
Last Film Saw: I saw HELP and A HARD DAY'S NIGHT yesterday. *(Laughter.)* And what's really interesting is in the first few shots of HARD DAY'S NIGHT is a shot of SON OF MAD, and you know by seeing the film that the director, Richard Lester, was very much influenced by MAD, it's so evident.
Last Film Actually Paid To See In A Theatre: ROGER RABBIT, I thought it was fabulous. COMIC BOOK CONFIDENTIAL is sort of like that, it has every comic-book character whereas ROGER RABBIT has every cartoon animated character.

MARTY: *A rude awakening in 1985 then.*

RON: It was. It was an incredible awakening. Not only was I was writing the script for Ivan, if I was going to do another documentary it was going to be on alternative theatre, and I had actually gotten grants at that point to make this film But I dropped the theatre idea immediately, I *knew* that I had to do a film about comic books. After talking with people at the convention, such as **Don and Maggie Thompson,** *I learned* about the period of the 1950s where **Fredric Wertham** wrote SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT and had really branded comics as . . . as I guess leading to juvenile delinquency The whole period of the '50s was fascinating to me, the idea that comic books were used as a scapegoat as leading to juvenile delinquency.

MARTY: *Did your mother ever say anything like this? You say she was the reason you stopped, she found them and threw them all out.*

RON: Yeah, that's true

MARTY: *Did she ever mention any of this?*

RON: No. You see, that's the *weird* thing A lot of mothers had the same perception of comics — it's changed *now* because it's become a respectable industry, it's a *collectable* item, but a lot of people still have those perceptions about comics. A lot of readers are always defending the comic-book medium. What I've discovered and what's interesting to me is that it *is* an art-form and it doesn't *have* to be defended. When I was talking to a lot of the artists on the film everyone was saying it's an artform, *defending* why it's an artform, talking about how comics are perceived as this kind of embarrassment; so the film

"I had an older brother who would pass it (*Mad*

© 1989 Ron Mann

Photo from the film COMIC BOOK CONFIDENTIAL

has a priority point of view, which is that comics are an artistic medium. I'm kinda sorta not answering your question, but what I feel is important in *my* discovery was that I wanted to *change* the perceptions that people have about comics —

MARTY: *I was wondering about that. Your prior documentaries that I am aware of, IMAGINE THE SOUND, POETRY IN MOTION, LISTEN TO THE CITY —*

RON: No, LISTEN TO THE CITY is a fiction film. IMAGINE THE SOUND is about jazz, the American artform.

MARTY: *But what I was getting at was with jazz and poetry . . . you wouldn't exactly call them mass media.*

RON: No.

MARTY: *By that it's not exactly counterculture but —*

RON: I understand what you're getting at, it's like those are subcultures yet comics are a popular culture. Well, it *is* a popular culture but it's *perceived* as superheroes. That's what I thought it was, I really thought comic books were about just supermen. What I discovered was it's a lot *more* than that, and that it has the *potential* of being a lot more than that, and the artists knew from the very beginning that it had an incredible potential. Through the years they've really done things with the medium.

MARTY: *How many people did you actually interview for this film?*

RON: About 45

MARTY: *So you were at the San Diego convention which year, do you recall?*

RON: I was there for two years, 1986 and 1987

MARTY: *And you had this germ of an idea at this 1986 con that you wanted to do this film?*

RON: Yes.

MARTY: *When did you actually feel serious, that you were starting?*

RON: I found the footage. I *knew* that footage existed, of the comic book burnings, of **Bill Gaines** at the Kefauver hearings, of the subsequent censorship of comics through the Comic Book Code Authority.

MARTY: *How did you know this footage existed?*

RON: Because it was too important, the Kefauver hearings were the first televised hearings, before McCarthy, so I knew that *somewhere* this footage existed in an

Magazine) on to me, and I started collecting."

© 1989 R. Crumb / H. Pekar

archives.

MARTY: *Or you assumed.*

RON: I assumed, yeah; but I sort of went beyond that, I definitely *knew* that something as *crazy* as this would *have* to have been covered by such a sensationalist medium as TV. So I knew I had to go and research this project a little further and see if I could find it. I had to tell that story visually and I thought if I found the footage — and I did find it — that that ultimately would be most important. That was one reason for seeing this project through.

Another was I knew I would have to get the participation of the artists, really I knew I couldn't make the film without **Will Eisner, Robert Crumb, Art Spiegelman** and **Harvey Kurtzman.** I mean I think *all* of the artists are tremendously important in the film, but I knew that those four in particular could not be omitted. So that was the first thing, I knew I had to talk to them; and the response from those four and the others that I talked to later was *always* positive, I've always had so much support and help from everyone. It started then with talking to **Jules Feiffer** and it led through a series of 45 interviews.

MARTY: *So you started with Jules Feiffer but he unfortunately didn't make the film.*

RON: No, he didn't make the film, but he helped me a lot with the Swan Foundation. Because I was with **Ivan Reitman** at that point, I did THE MAKING OF LEGAL EAGLES, behind the scenes with **Robert Redford, Debra Winger** and **Daryl Hannah.** So what I did was I took the crew, while making that documentary in New York, and half the day I would shoot THE MAKING OF LEGAL EAGLES and the other half the day I would shoot interviews in New York — so I didn't have any costs at the beginning. *(Laughter.)* So I would shoot on the streets of Manhattan —

MARTY: *Ivan Reitman is aware of this.*

RON: No. *(Laughter.)* But I'm sure his executive producer would be very happy

Harvey "Late Night with David Letterman" Pekar, as drawn by Robert Crumb.

with what I did. Especially **Michael C. Gross,** who used to do the comics pages in THE NATIONAL LAMPOON, the editor, he has a long history with comics and I'm sure he would have encouraged me. But they did not know. But after that I went to see **Jules Feiffer** and asked him what to do, and the Swan Foundation is a foundation which promotes the idea of comics as an artform, they gave me money to start the film. And then **Bo Nichol, Mark Askwith** of the Silver Snail, and **Charles Lippincott** and I tried to shape the film, how the interviews should go. Because I'm an outsider kind of looking in, I'm relying on the expertise and the basic advice that I would get from people —

MARTY: *In your own words you're an outsider.*

RON: Yes, very much so.

MARTY: *So you had a hell of a history to catch up on, from when you were 12 to just a few years ago.*

RON: Yeah.

MARTY: *I know that there's a hell of a lot of history there and it's hard to encompass it all, but how did your own influences and what you saw transpire into your film? You seemed to go from the '40s and '50s and then jump right into the '80s almost.*

RON: No, I deal with the '60s. What I've done is basically made clear choices — it's *not* a history per se and anybody who comes to this film and sees it as such is going to be disappointed. It's in a historical context, in a social historical context, in that as we've grown up with comics — which is what I wanted really to show — comics have grown up. So I've used the kind of *dynamic* of history as a structure.

"A lot of readers are always defending the

The choices I had to make in terms of who is in the film were based on the advice of a lot of comic-book people, such as **Art Spiegelman, Denis Kitchen, bp Nichol** and **Mark Askwith.** I mean I *relied* on their advice up to a point, and I filmed a lot of artists, a list from **Jules Feiffer** to **Carl Barks,** and ultimately you're editing 60 hours of film down to 90 minutes — which is an incredible task — and you have to make a lot of hard choices. You have to realize ultimately it's a film and *some* interviews work cinematically, some don't. A lot of choices can be made depending on does it work in the film, does it work in the narrative of the film.

MARTY: *Who were you making the film for?*

RON: I was making it not for a comic-book audience, I was making it for a general audience. My main purpose was to make this an outreach film, not a film for a limited audience. I *wanted* to make a theatrical film, I wanted to make — and I believe I have — an entertaining, informative film, and I wanted an audience who like me hadn't picked up a comic since age 12, who would rediscover the medium and discover that it's gone *bonkers! (Laughter.)* I think that was my clear direction from the beginning. I wanted to rediscover the medium and have an audience rediscover it. That audience is not the audience that goes to comic-book conventions or goes to comic-book stores. I wanted to reach the audience that I would reach normally with my films, which is a mainstream audience.

I know this film is going to interest people who read comics and people who go to conventions, they *are* going to be the first audience to see this film, and I think they will be satisfied. You know, you always wonder who is that name on the bottom of that page, you want to put the face with the name, and I think that was one of the objectives, and *definitely* the comic-book audience is going to be *thrilled* to see some of their heroes. One of the joys of making any kind of documentary is that you meet your heroes, and I was meeting *my* heroes, like **Bill Gaines** and **Harvey Kurtzman. Art Spiegelman** who I rediscovered . . . not rediscovered —

MARTY: *Discovered on your own.*

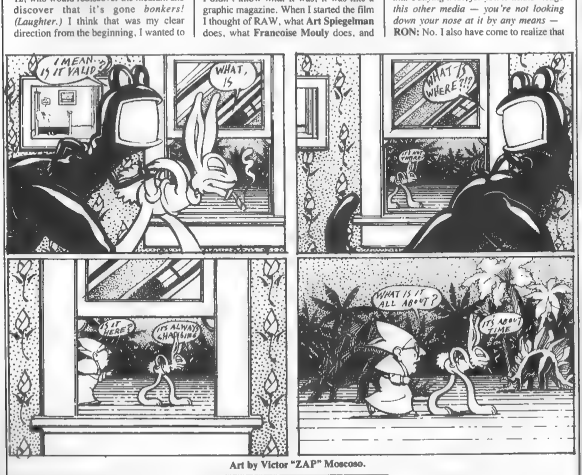
RON: I walked into an art gallery in Paris in '82 and saw RAW and had *no* idea what it was; I didn't consider it a comic book, I didn't know *what* it was, it was like a graphic magazine. When I started the film I thought of RAW, what **Art Spiegelman** does, what **Francoise Mouly** does, and it was incredible tracing this incredible lineage to **George Herriman,** you know; and fitting that all in in these sort of broad sweeping gestures that any film does, because it's not an encyclopedia or a book, I found that really exciting. And . . . I don't know. These are images that are identifiable, Spider-Man is identifiable — I remember it, I must have read SPIDER-MAN when I was a kid.

MARTY: *Sure. But your own revelations were that you started just a couple of years ago, and it's like here's a whole new world of how comic books have evolved.*

RON: Yeah. Well, I've now learned that they've been evolving from the very beginning. In my own experience I would definitely say that since . . . you know, I have to admit that I *was* fully conscious of what **Robert Crumb** was doing, in a very limited way, from underground newspapers and strip art. But I had never considered that comics are words and pictures and could be as good as any other medium, as good as what the artists want to do.

MARTY: *As a professional filmmaker that's saying a lot, for you to acknowledge this other media — you're not looking down your nose at it by any means —*

RON: No. I also have come to realize that



© 1983 V Moscoso

Art by Victor "ZAP" Moscoso.

comic book medium — it doesn't have to be."

POT-SHOT PETE...
Sheriff of Yucca-pucca Gulch
LAWBREAKERS, SIDEWINDERS, AND OWL-HOOTS, BEWARE! JUSTICE COMES SWIFT IN YUCCA-PUCCA GULCH! POT-SHOT PETE IS THE LAW WEST OF THE BRAZOS, AND PITY THE POOR HOMBRE WHO DISTURBS THE PEACE... AS YOU SHALL SEE IN THE FOLLOWING STORY!
POT-SHOT! WE'VE BEEN ENGAGED FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS! WE'RE GOING TO BE MARRIED ANY DAY NOW! WE'VE BEEN CHILDHOOD SWEETHEARTS FOR THE PAST TWENTY YEARS! AND IN ALL THEM YEARS YOU HAIN'T NEVER KISSED ME! PUH-LEASE, POT-SHOT-- KIZZ ME!
AAWR... KISSING GURLS HAIN'T NO FUN! DONTCHA KNOW US COWBOYS GOT BUT ONE LOVE-- OUR HOSS?!
SHERIFF POT-SHOT! COME QUICK! TWO-GUN ZILCH IS ON A TEAR!
KISS KISS
REWARD
WANTED
DEAD OR ALIVE
© 1989
H. Kurtzman

Nuff said!

comics have always been *compared* to other media, such as film as motion pictures on paper, or it has something to do with theatre, it has something to do with literature, it has something to do with painting, but what's interesting about comics, what's *exciting* about comics, is that they're *comics*. I mean fuck people if they don't understand. I'm trying to convert people to an understanding of comics. I'm not interested in defending the medium it's there.

At the same time, I guess, of my discovery of comics, they were not only in comic-book stores, they were in bookstores. What I'm really sensing is comics are now branching out again into the mainstream audience. All of these articles that are appearing, you know, in SPIN MAGAZINE, it's that change in perception about the medium which is really fantastic. Especially the way the film starts with this guy showing why comic books should be banned, it's that from the beginning; it's the attitude that you have walking into the theatre, but by the end you have rediscovered how exciting the medium is. It's really just the tip of the iceberg.

To get back to your question about the choices that I made. I could not put everything in. There were so *many* artists . I couldn't sleep nights the fact that I didn't put in covers of HELP! and HUMBUG. I really agonized over this film because I have to be true, as an outsider, to somebody else's art; I have a tremendous responsibility to the artists themselves, *and* to an incredible amount of people who respect and read comics. It's a *crushing* responsibility. **Carl Barks** is one of those people that has legions of fans that I really wanted to satisfy by putting him in the film, but I just could not figure out how to do it. That's my limits as a filmmaker. I just could not figure it out. There's also considerations like you run out of money, you run out of steam, you run out of energy. You basically run out of steam and money, that's what happened to me. That's the way someone has described editing, you know: The film is never finished, it just stops! That's what happened, and it stop-

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"I was fully conscious of what Robert Crumb was doing."

ped at a point where **Carl Barks** was not in the film. I hope there will be another film. Anything to promote the medium is what I'm trying to do, and I think the next film, COMIC BOOK CONFIDENTIAL II or whatever —

MARTY: *SON OF CONFIDENTIAL.*

RON: — will have **Carl Barks** in it. I just could not fit him in. I did not have gray hair before I started this. *(Laughter.)*

It's amazing because there are so many people who have different versions of this history, I was totally freaked out because I could never get any kind of straight answers half the time. *(Laughter.)* And you have to *read* a lot of books, not just the historical texts but the books themselves, to get a real good sense of what was happening.

MARTY: *Did you find out about . . . Did you discover any of your own revelations as to what the banning, the censorship, the Comics Code, why it was instituted, and the way it's changing now?*

RON: Well, you know, **Frank Zappa** — I was so interested in the idea of censorship, not just within comic-book history but also within the cycle of outrage within the recurring banning —

MARTY: *Tipper Gore and* —

RON: Right, the banning of records. I wanted to trace how the Comic Book Code Authority led to other types of censorship, and the current problem within comics as well. It's the same problem, in the '60s they had the bannings and busts of the underground comics, of **Crumb,** to the present time.

MARTY: *You do spend a fair amount of time on the undergrounds.*

RON: Yes.

MARTY: *And inside that bit on the undergrounds is a bit on AIR PIRATES.*

RON: Right, that's another bust, **Dan O'Neill's** case with Disney where he defiled Mickey's innocent delightfulness.

MARTY: *Are you at all worried or maybe a little bit scared that Disney might come down on you?*

RON: No. I mean Dan's just talking about his court case, and Dan's case basically was that he did *not* draw Mickey Mouse, he drew a *parody* of Mickey Mouse, and Disney said that that is the real Mickey Mouse. So . . . I don't know, it would be kind of weird if Disney wanted to spend another twelve years in court. *(Laughter.)* But I don't think they have any case against me, it's an historical example, not as if I were out to do what Dan did. In terms of his point, the point is made in the film that comics at that time took a different direction, it wasn't just about sex and drugs, the subject matter became more political, more politically overt. It wasn't just about hippies and the Haight, it was more politically oriented. Women's issues were present, such as what **Trina Robbins** was doing, and **Shary Flenniken** and a number of women artists. Dan is taking on an institution like Disney, **Bill Griffith** is taking on society as a whole! *(Laughter.)* And that's my point really.

Frank Zappa Goes To Washington to testify against ratings for rock lyrics .

MARTY: *You kind of gloss over what's been referred to as the Silver Age of Comics, the superheroes. You do talk about Marvel and you do interview Stan Lee and he is featured in the film, but there's a big jump between the mainstream '50s comics into the '80s comics*

RON: In terms of superheroes?

MARTY: *The mainstream*

RON: Well, it's a thread that runs throughout the film. I mean comics started with the superhero genre — not started but, you know, Superman came along in 1938 and then there was a plethora of superhero comics through World War II Then interest in superheroes began to wane and it was **Julius Schwartz's** rein-

ZIPPY by Bill Griffith.

Photo © 1984 UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos

© 1989 B. Griffith

"It would be kind of weird if Disney wanted to

troduction of the Flash in 1956 that revived interest in the superheroes, and in the early '60s **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** created a tremendous interest in the superhero genre. That's all you can say about superheroes, for me. I mean the stories have not really . . . there hasn't been really any major kinds of changes, I don't see them. I'm sure a lot of people are going to be really upset, but they've just battled on. For me superheroes don't have any interest, they just continue to multiply — there's now so many superheroes that the universe is so safe — *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *Or the universe should be so safe.*

RON: Yeah. What I thought was the most interesting change was with **Frank Miller** and THE DARK KNIGHT and RONIN. RONIN really captured *my* imagination, but up until that point I don't think there was *anything* interesting happening in the superhero genre at all. Now, sure, JUDGE DREDD and a lot of the people who have borrowed *from* JUDGE DREDD in America, if you want to consider vigilante stories and more violent stories more realistic, well fine. But to me there's nothing new happening, it's basically good against evil or that kind of morality going on. The new BATMAN I really thought was a clear new direction in terms of where superhero comics were kind of going. But it's clear, even **Frank Miller** says it in the film, superheroes are dying right now. I mean when I was filming this — a lot of people don't want to acknowledge this — but no one was buying SUPERMAN. The real change came with THE DARK KNIGHT and THE WATCHMEN, I think those were two important new steps in terms of the evolution of the superhero genre.

But there's a lot more than superheroes to comics, and that's why I did not really focus and dwell on it. I mean it would just be redundant and I really wanted to move forward in terms of what the medium could do. In terms of the '60s it's what **Robert Crumb** did. He broke so many taboos and he really made it possible for people to say whatever they want in comics. He really made it possible. I think comics owe an incredible debt to **Robert Crumb.** Just as an outsider, you know, I think there's God and then there's **Robert Crumb.** *(Laughter.)* And I think that the entire underground movement, not just the San Francisco cartoonists and artists and writers but what was happening in Chicago, what was happening in the East Village in New York, really became a catalyst that *mirrored* the same feelings that a lot of counterculture people had, what people in the antiwar movement had, that said basically "We see how corrupt the people who are making the decisions are and we're gonna talk about it." I think *that's* what's interesting about comics, when they can actually talk about society, when it becomes so much attached to not just comic-book history but *our* history.

And it doesn't have to be *that* way, as **Harvey Pekar** has successfully shown, it can be about *anything*, it can be as mundane as everyday life — and *that* can be as great as a **James Joyce** novel.

MARTY: *Do you think you are going to shock people who are not familiar with the comic-book industry*

RON: Oh, hell yeah. I've already seen it. I've seen people watch this who are absolutely *fascinated* with this stuff. And

Artwork by Charles Burns.

© 1989 C. Burns

spend another twelve years in court — (Laughter)."

© 1989 Jaime Hernandez

what's great about it is this film sells books. I would have a screening of people like myself who have *never* read a comic book since the age of 12, and they are *completely* fascinated with this medium and they want to know where to get books by **Art Spiegelman,** want to know about **Harvey Kurtzman,** want to know about **Bill Griffith.** They really want to find out *more*, and that's what I think is going to be the most exciting part of the distribution of this film

MARTY: *This film is going to get a lot of exposure at film festivals and —*

RON: It already got accepted to the Berlin Film Festival, the most prestigious film festival in the world. It's just amazing to hear that the response has been so terrific in Berlin. And it got accepted to the Toronto Film Festival, it's going to the Vancouver Film Festival, it'll be in the Montreal Film Festival, and it'll be at the United States Film Festival in Salt Lake City, Utah. It's going to get out in a big way. It's a 35mm, 90 minutes feature film so you can see it in the same theatres where you see ROGER RABBIT. It is opening in three theatres in Toronto, the Carlton, the Canada Square, and the Eton Center — and the Canada Square is an espresso coffee house theatre, it's *legit! (Laughter.)* But it's a real movie, you know, and I think that's what I want to get across. It's an entertaining 90-minute film and hopefully it will reach the audience that, you know, might have been a little suspect about comics but by the end is going to be so enthralled with the medium

MARTY: *Anything you'd like to say that I didn't get to?*

RON: Go see the movie! *(Laughter.)* I think there's an irony that a Canadian made this film about American comics, I think that's quite interesting. It took a Canadian to sort of recognize that this is an indigenous American artform. It's also giving voice to a type of alternative, which is what I'm all about. When you watch television you get the same junk on every channel, what I'm trying to do is find a space in between those programs. It's not representative, there *are* no films about comic books, there's *no* films about artists and cartoonists and writers — in the television medium — there's no films about jazz or poetry

It's those artforms which make up my experiences, make up who I am and ultimately who we all are, and I think it's my *responsibility* as a documentary filmmaker that I have to seek out and find the type of culture that I associate myself with It's not subculture, not a minority, it's one of *my* passions — and now comics are one of my passions I think that's really important, I think you need a voice, you need to represent in mainstream media, and I don't mean articles in SPIN, I mean like what's happening now in art galleries, what's happening now with this film.

MARTY: *Respectability.*

RON: Yeah, I think ultimately it gets back to that, even though I really don't want to feel that I have to defend comics anymore, I don't feel that artists have to defend it anymore

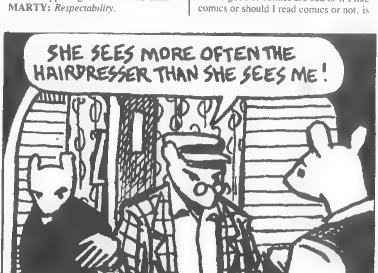
MARTY: *But still you don't see too many BMWs with comic books in the back*

RON: No, you do.

MARTY: *The yuppies haven't discovered comic books yet.* (Laughter.)

RON: I think they have — well, I think everybody has. I may be wrong but I think more intelligent artists are coming into the medium and it's become more sophisticated, and there is an intelligent audience that is picking up on this *because* of the work itself. Like **Walt Whitman** said, to have great poetry you have to have a great audience. I see that as what's happening, there are great comics and there is a great audience: that includes yuppies and comic-book fans of all ages.

You know, it's not just selling 10,000 copies of an issue. A lot of the people in the film just sell 10,000 copies, a lot of them can't even make a living as cartoonists, and I'm trying to change all that. But it's important to have an outlet, and I think if the yuppies have not discovered comics then it's important that they discover it. The only way for them to discover it is if they are in front of them. Honestly, I did not know the Silver Snail existed in Toronto, I did not *know*. You know, there are 24 comic-book stores and I would pass by them. I thought those stores were for kids and I would never be caught *dead* in one When I walked into the Silver Snail I was just completely a changed person. I had to reexamine myself. So there is no choice to say if comics are good or comics are bad or if I like comics or should I read comics or not, is



Art Spiegelman's MAUS.

© 1989 A Spiegelman

"All films are like a discovery. I'm glad to have made this film."

it a valid medium or is it not a valid medium, if there's no opportunity to even have the choice to see what's there, what's out there. I think that's it.

There are comic-book stores and that's *it*, that's where they're ghettoized. That's why this whole new renaissance of it being in bookstores, of it being on television or in the movie theatres, gives somebody the opportunity at least to make a decision for themselves; do they want to read comics, is there something going on there. But they remember their mothers told them not to read comics, they don't want their kids to read comics, it's become very important to have films like this, and more books. **Robert Crumb** actually is very interesting, he sort of says he hopes the word doesn't get out *too* much because it's like really important to have that kind of status. But at the same time I think it's important to get away from the fact that comic books are a business like making artificial limbs and rubber stamps and cheap candy and toys. Again, I'm only speaking from an outsider's point of view. I still don't consider myself part of inner circle fandom, I'm only looking at it in terms of cultural history and I may be wrong about everything. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *But you've made your statement, it comes across in the film, that this is a respectable medium.*

RON: Yeah, oh yeah. I figure it *has* been for a long time, I think **Kurtzman** and **Gaines** made it incredibly respectable. **Eisner** — everybody that's in the film. It was a literary medium for **Eisner,** you know. For **Kurtzman** it was where he could be a satirist and a humorist and develop new forms to carry any kind of message.

MARTY: *I can remember in film school being taught by Will Eisner. I say being taught by Eisner, it was a film teacher showing angles of perspective and different camera shots, high and low, using THE SPIRIT.*

RON: Yeah. the art. My film sort of deals with the *content*, the storytelling, the idea of words *and* pictures, but does not get into this sort of analysis of comics. If you want to talk about that, certainly **Will Eisner** redefined the medium with cinematic storytelling, and everybody knows and acknowledges his mastery as an incredibly expressive artist. **Jack Kirby,** in terms of the superhero genre, really *made* superheroes come alive. You can compare **Al Feldstein's** work to fine woodcuts. Golly, there's so much that you can say about the artistry, not just cartooning as a simplification process but actually as an incredible artistic medium just like painting. I'm in *awe* of some of this stuff. I really am. I mean there's so much going on, it's so *complicated*, it has as much brilliance that you would find in . . . I don't know, a Renaissance painting — and it's as wild as an abstract expressionist painting.

© 1989 DC Comics, Inc.

Just on that level, the way stories are told in terms of the panels, people have broken down formulas. **Art Spiegelman** looks at what's going on at the edge of a panel, **Francoise Mouly** experiments, it keeps them interested and it's redefining the form, and that makes it an art in itself, this like dialectical process of art that keeps it evolving as a medium, that keeps commenting on what went on before while synthesizing new ideas. Geez! Whether you go for simplistic styles or more complicated styles, ultimately there so much power. Art is what artists do, it's what **John Cage** said, and I believe that, and these people are real artists.

And we're having an art show for this film, in the other room I've got 15 original art pieces. This film is sort of like an event, not only do you have the screenings in the theatres but we have an art show of 30 original pieces that will go to Vancouver, will go to Montreal, will go to Berlin — so this film is kind of like a travelling event. It's really really extraordinary, we're having an art show that's going with this film. And there's also a comic book that we're doing, we have so much.

MARTY: *Where do you see this film going after the festivals? A lot of people will read this interview and say, "Fantastic, I want to see this film."*

RON: Well, it's opening this fall in Canada, it's going across Canada. It is also planned to go across the States. At this point we don't have definite dates, but it's definitely coming to a theatre near you! *(Laughter.)* I'm really happy with the whole project. I mean tearing my hair out in the middle of the night, I really worked so hard on this film it's ridiculous, it's like embarrassing — with a lot of creative people, not just by myself. But in the end there's a real satisfaction. It's like a work of art in itself.

MARTY: *Any regrets?*

RON: I couldn't make a 60-hour movie. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *Well, from what I've seen — which wasn't even the finished film — I think it's phenomenal, I was really intrigued. It's letting the artists tell their own stories.*

RON: Right, that's the most important thing, it's a non-narrative documentary as opposed to a narrative documentary that kind of like holds you by the hand and tells you this and that. Everybody who worked on this knew they were working on an important project, a project that they felt they *wanted* to contribute something to because everyone believed in the idea of comics as a passionate medium. So their contribution and support made this film possible. Everywhere I went it was always "How can we help you?" It has definitely changed my life. All films are like a discovery, and I'm glad to have made this film.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

ALWAYS AN OPEN FORUM

Dear Editor:

I just wanted to drop you a line to thank you for printing my open letter to the editors of AMAZING HEROES and COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE in COMICS INTERVIEW #66. It's good to see that there is at least *one* fanzine that is willing to give the fans a chance to speak out.

I wrote that letter some time ago and originally sent copies to both AH and CBG which, naturally, were never printed in either publication. I also wrote to **Max Allan Collins** *personally*, via DC Comics, to give him an opportunity to straighten the matter out, but received no luck there either. At last, I came to the conclusion that the parties involved had no intention of doing anything about this, so I took matters into my own hands and sent copies of my letter to other fanzines, one of which finally saw print in your publication.

A recent development I'd like to point out is that a letter of mine was printed recently in AH #158. Editor **Chris McCubbin** took exception to my doubts that my letter would see print in AH, but I had ever reason to believe that after former editor **Kevin Dooley** failed to print any of my responses to **Collins**. If **McCubbin** is sincere in his claim that he will print *all* letters — complimentary or critical — then I say, more power to him. But if I ever have this problem again, I'm glad to know there is an open forum in COMICS INTERVIEW for me to voice my feelings. Thanks again.

Danny DeAngelo
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SIGNATURE PLAN FOR SIEGEL & SHUSTER

Dear Sirs,

In the December 1988 issue of PLAYBOY, SF writer **Harlan Ellison** mentions that Superman's creators, **Jerry Siegel** and **Joe Shuster** are in dire financial straits. Would it be possible for we fans to send them, say, a five dollar check, in return for their autographs on the back of the checks? In that way, we fans could help them out, and we would have the authentic signatures of Superman's creators as a memento. That covers it. Thanks.

Robert G Schreib, Jr
31 Inverness Terrace
Fords, NJ 08863

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

PERSONAL TRIUMPH

Folks —

I must have the first WATCHMEN issue of COMICS INTERVIEW. Here's a fin; please zip the thing to me (#48, of course).

You might note in a future COMICS INTERVIEW that WATCHMEN became the first comic book/graphic novel/whatever to win a Hugo Award when the New Orleans World Science Fiction Convention voted **Moore** and **Gibbons** the same in the category named "Other Forms." I fought for that category and for science fiction fandom's recognition of comics as a worthy part of the genre; to see WATCHMEN win was a personal triumph.

Thanks for splendid work.

Guy Lillian III
4217-E Fontainebleau Dr.
New Orleans, LA 70125

INTERVIEW TOPS IN GERMANY

Dear Sirs,

I would like to express how much I enjoy the COMICS INTERVIEW. It contains a lot of background information which I can't find in any other magazine (especially here in Germany).

Cordially,

Jan Majro
Gollstrasse .8.
8000 München 2
West Germany

INTERVIEW: HOW-TO COURSE IN COMICS

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW,

Issue #63 was awesome, featuring writer/editor **Mike Baron,** artist/editor **Carl Potts,** artist **Jim Lee** and artist **Chris Warner.**

I'm hoping to become a well-known illustrator for some years to come in this ever expanding comic book world. This issue will help me out a whole bunch!! I need that first opportunity and hearing how others got started in the business should make it much easier for myself. After reading your magazine for the first time, I know now that I need to change my ways.

I've been "at it" for approximately six months and have had three upright, straightforward, direct letters from DC Comics saying I'm not up to their standards yet. I am glad they've been turning me down because maybe I wouldn't make that deadline — and get fired — just like **Warner** did at DC. I don't want that!!

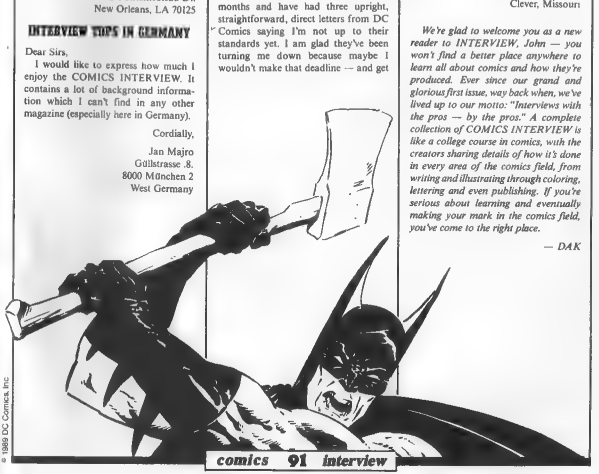
I am now at the point **Jim Lee** said he once was. (What size paper do I use? — still don't know but I guess it doesn't matter since there is such a thing as stat-cameras, for reduction.) (Can they do the word balloons with transparent overlays?) I already knew about checking artwork in the mirror but never thought of tracing for practice, to help understand the way it's done. And also, your interview with **Lee** gave me a feel of what it would be like my first time. At least now I know what to expect.

Thanks to you, I'm going to practice to the point where I will know I'm ready. I'm looking forward to the next issue of COMICS INTERVIEW.

John Phillips
Clever, Missouri

We're glad to welcome you as a new reader to INTERVIEW, John — you won't find a better place anywhere to learn all about comics and how they're produced. Ever since our grand and glorious first issue, way back when, we've lived up to our motto: "Interviews with the pros — by the pros." A complete collection of COMICS INTERVIEW is like a college course in comics, with the creators sharing details of how it's done in every area of the comics field, from writing and illustrating through coloring, lettering and even publishing. If you're serious about learning and eventually making your mark in the comics field, you've come to the right place.

— DAK



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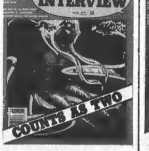

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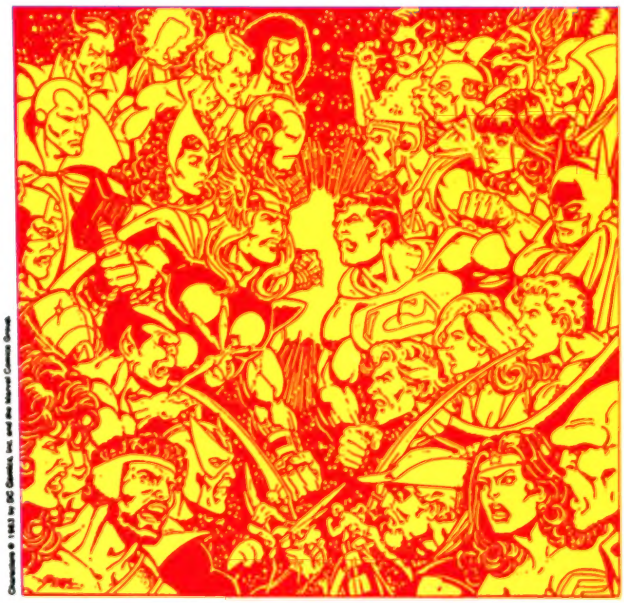

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